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MEDIA COMPETENCIES IN THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN POSTGRADUATE EDUCATION CONTEXTS: A Mixed-Method Study

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ABSTRACT

This study examines postgraduate students' media competencies in social network use through a mixed-methods parallel convergent design. A structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews assessed six competency dimensions. Results indicate high performance in most areas, especially digital communication/interaction and digital citizenship, suggesting active and ethical online participation. However, competencies related to interpreting media language and producing content are less developed, showing a tendency toward consuming and sharing information rather than critical or creative authorship for academic or social aims. Overall, the findings point to an imbalance between functional participation and reflective production, highlighting the need for curricular innovation that places media competencies at the core and implements teaching strategies to strengthen hybrid learning, conscious creation, and transformative engagement on digital platforms and social media.

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1. Introduction

Technology is advancing rapidly, requiring teachers to stay up to date in order to optimise teaching processes in line with the demands of the times and new ways of learning (Choez Pilay & Herrera, 2024). Circumstances require teachers to follow a path of continuous training and develop their digital competencies. In Latin America, the development of these competencies at university is key for a full digital citizenship, although challenges remain in media literacy, as some teachers still mistakenly assume that the digital competencies of students are innate, despite the context of increasing mediatisation (Mateus & Quiroz, 2021).

Media competencies have been addressed for some time, but in the field of education and at the global level, there is still no single definition and no formal curriculum (Mateus et al., 2019). Doungphummes et al. (2024) state that media competency is the ability to critically access the content of digital media and platforms, analyse it, produce one's own messages in an ethical and responsible manner, and actively participate in communicative environments for the construction of digital citizenship. Meanwhile, for Ferrés & Piscitelli (2012), Melgarejo-Moreno (2021), Kačinová & Sádaba (2022) and Portugal Escobar (2021), it is a set of knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for critical, active and conscious interaction with the media and information technologies, both in the reception and production of messages; that is, for the authors, media competency is knowing how to think critically, knowing how to do and knowing how to be in front of the media.

Media competencies are in line with media education, which advocates the critical use of information and communication media in a digital environment, where working with such media allows for critical reflection on society and its environment, with regard to the ways in which messages are transmitted and their respective explicit and implicit meanings. Media education is understood as the pedagogical process aimed at developing citizens' ability to access, critically understand, produce and participate ethically in communicative and digital ecosystems, promoting their autonomy, creativity and active citizenship (Alcolea-Díaz et al., 2020; Sánchez-López et al., 2021).

The dimensions of media competency proposed by Ferrés & Piscitelli (2012) are organised into six broad areas that integrate the cognitive, emotional and social. In the area of language, the ability to understand the codes and formats of the media is assessed; in the area of technology, the mastery of the tools and resources to access, produce and disseminate content; in the area of interaction, active and conscious participation in communicative environments; in the area of production and dissemination, the ability to create messages with expressive, aesthetic and ethical intent; in the area of ideology and values, the critical reading of media discourses and the identification of stereotypes, biases or underlying interests; and in the area of aesthetics, the appreciation and creation of products with expressive quality and creativity, fostering sensitivity and a taste for cultural diversity.

In the dimension of language, according to the authors cited, media literacy is a necessary skill today because its development facilitates learning processes and is essential for interacting with the information circulating in digital media, which are mandatory for students to consult. In the case of postgraduates, the responsibility is greater, since higher levels of competencies are required for verifying information because they must deliver academic and research products of higher quality and commitment. In this sense, for Ferrés & Piscitelli (2012), "Mastering the language of the media involves understanding its syntax, rhetoric and narrative in order to read and write critically" (p. 78). These types of skills, which are necessary in postgraduate education, are attributed to the academic and research responsibility that comes with being a postgraduate student. However, in the current context, this is an unmet demand that must be addressed in university classrooms at both the postgraduate and undergraduate levels.

Another aspect related to the aforementioned dimension is the mastery of digital language, which is made up of codes, formats, resources and other elements that must be interpreted and understood, especially their intentionality or implicit message, which are expressed in signs and symbols. In this regard, according to Area & Pessoa (2012), "Digital language requires users not only to have reading comprehension, but also the ability to decode hyperlinks, symbols, hashtags and memes as complete discursive units" (p. 15). The use of digital language requires digital literacy at all times.

Regarding the technology and interaction dimension, indicated by Ferrés & Piscitelli (2012), independent study with digital media is a common feature of postgraduate studies, which requires students to have technological skills and the ability to interact with their peers in order to develop

competencies. These actions take place in virtual learning spaces and require the use of increasingly varied tools and resources. In this regard, Aguaded (2014), Buckingham (2006), Gutiérrez-Martín & Kathleen Tyner (2012) and Hobbs (2010) refer to the need for media competencies that allow students to interact critically with technological tools, since simply using them does not guarantee the critical awareness that should characterise interaction in the educational process.

Currently, people with postgraduate studies are younger than in the past, due to ease of access and academic offerings, which is attributed to a more favourable and natural relationship with the use of technology. Therefore, it is important to use social networks to achieve personal and social development, taking advantage of its benefits for intrapersonal, interpersonal, and transpersonal development, while avoiding negative comparisons and dependence (Mustapha, 2024; Otero Escobar, 2025). Therefore, the social media skills that characterise young people feed into the diagnosis and relevance of strengthening media competencies with greater emphasis on postgraduates, due to the responsibility that this level demands in the academic and research fields.

The ability to evaluate and generate new knowledge is demanded of postgraduates in their training and professional performance, which requires critical judgement and skills to discriminate between true and false information (Halpern, 2024; Orhan et al., 2023). This demand for abilities involves moving beyond the passive reception of information and knowledge to become a prosumer who interacts, but above all generates new knowledge; that is, the era of media and information demands going beyond simply teaching critical media competencies, which implies venturing into "transmedia literacy" (Deschênes, 2024; Gurgun & Yıldırım, 2024; Orhan et al., 2023; Scolari et al., 2018).

One of the limitations in the development of media competencies for reception and critical thinking is the way in which social networks demand brief, immediate interactions with reactions that reinforce cognitive bubbles. In this regard, it is important to develop strategies for training media competencies that lead to the use, processing and creation of information in an objective, responsible and ethical manner (Murcia Rodríguez, 2025; Tombleson, 2024). Nevertheless, the study by Rojas-Estrada et al. (2023) found that none of the Latin American countries had a degree programme whose main objective was media competency, but rather the generalised presence of its dimensions, which suggests its inclusion as a cross-sectional component.

The creation of original content is part of the learning activities of postgraduate students, which are programmed into class sessions as evidence of the mastery of skills and abilities that must be achieved during the process and at the end of their studies (Muringa & Adjin-Tettey, 2024). This production is not sufficient, as it must be done with social and ethical responsibility. All academic or scientific production requires activating levels of creative competence and the implications of its production, creation, and even dissemination in digital media such as social networks, which demands ethical commitment.

Often, the production and creation of knowledge is reduced to sharing information or knowledge produced and circulated on social networks, which makes it necessary to rethink the training strategies of postgraduate students so that, as pointed out by Halpern (2024); Korona & Hutchison (2023), Park (2024), Rega et al. (2024), y y Scolari et al. (2018), publication not only turns users into consumers of information, but also encourages them to make an impact through more active participation with transformative intent.

Collaborative relationships among postgraduate students arise in digital learning environments and in the search for information and knowledge for academic and research purposes (Deschênes, 2024; Huang, 2025; Nsamba, 2023; Wilson, 2023). In this sense, communication and interaction are essential for the development of media competencies. As García Montero (2025), points out, "media competency cannot be reduced to technical skills, but rather involves sustainable and conscious practices in relation to the symbolic and material environment" (p. 48), which is the guidance offered by Halpern (2024).

The ideology and values component of media competencies in postgraduate studies is relevant for interaction and knowledge generation; its training must be incorporated into teaching strategies and the curriculum. However, in an autonomous work environment, this is constantly challenged when students are exposed to social media. In this regard, Ferrés & Piscitelli (2012) and Muringa & Adjin-Tettey (2024) emphasise that educating aesthetic sensitivity to computer and communication media involves developing a person's ability to enjoy, but at the same time to debate, their expressive devices. Thus, social media has transformed aesthetics into symbolic capital, where "the image no longer only represents, but also legitimises social belonging" (Fontcuberta, 2014, p. 22).

This study set out to analyse the media competencies of postgraduate students in their use of social media, identifying their communication practices, levels of critical thinking and digital content production strategies, using a mixed approach. More specifically: a) to quantify the degree of development of media competencies in terms of access, critical analysis, interaction and production on social media, through the application of a structured questionnaire; b) to explore, through interviews, the perceptions and experiences of postgraduates regarding the use of social media as spaces for learning, academic interaction, and professional identity building; and c) to contrast quantitative and qualitative results to determine patterns, tensions, or gaps in the development of media competencies based on variables such as age, disciplinary area, professional experience, or type of social network used.

2. Methodology

The study used a mixed convergent parallel design, in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analysed simultaneously and then integrated in the joint interpretation phase, allowing for comparison of results and generation of more robust explanations (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The participants in the quantitative component were 144 postgraduate students from a Peruvian university, a number determined using a statistical formula with a confidence level of 95%, error of 0.05, and p and q values determined in a pilot study with 50 students. In the case of the qualitative component, 15 interviews were conducted using a semi-structured guide until information saturation was reached (Esquivel Grados, 2025). The integration of approaches was not only assumed as cross-verification, but also as a strategy for expansion and interpretative complementarity, according to the approaches to rigour in mixed research (Lorenzini et al., 2024).

A 24-item questionnaire on media competencies in the use of social media was applied, developed with academic rigour according to the international references of Ferrés and Piscitelli (2012), Pérez-Tornero (2019) and the UNESCO-MIL (Media and Information Literacy) indicators, adapted to the Peruvian and Latin American university context. It was designed on the aforementioned basis with a 4-point Likert ordinal scale. Content validity was assessed by expert judgement, achieving an Aiken V index that exceeded the required 0.80, and reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, achieving a value higher than the expected 0.85 (Hernández Sampieri & Mendoza Torres, 2023). In the case of the interview guide, experts evaluated the relevance of the questions according to the criteria of sufficiency, clarity, coherence, and relevance (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

For the analysis of the data, a methodological triangulation process was used to ensure the validity and interpretative depth of the results (Arias Valencia, 2022; Maxwell, 2024). Initially, the questionnaire responses were subjected to descriptive statistical analysis, which allowed us to identify general trends in the level of media competencies reported. Subsequently, the interviews were analysed using thematic coding, following an inductive approach (Gibbs, 2012). Then, both sets of information were systematically compared to identify convergences, divergences, and complementarities, recognising that triangulation functions not only as a verification technique but also as a strategy for expanding meaning (Forni & de Grande, 2020). This cross-referencing of quantitative and qualitative data enabled a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study, overcoming the limitations inherent in a single analytical approach.

3. Results and discussion

The results of the study, which used a mixed convergent parallel design, are shown below:

Table 1. Statistical summaries of scores on media competencies in social media use, by dimension

Dimensions	Mean (M)	Median (Me)	Coefficient of variation (CV)
Language and media literacy	11.26	11.00	0.22
Technology and interaction	12.57	12.50	0.19
Reception and critical thinking	12.26	12.00	0.18
Content production and creation	11.93	12.00	0.19
Communication and interaction on networks	13.13	14.00	0.18
Ideology, values, and digital citizenship	12.78	12.00	0.14

Note: As each dimension has four items on a scale of 1-4, an average in the range [4, 8] indicates a low level of skill development; [8-12] indicates a medium level; and [12-16] indicates a high level. Own elaboration, 2025.

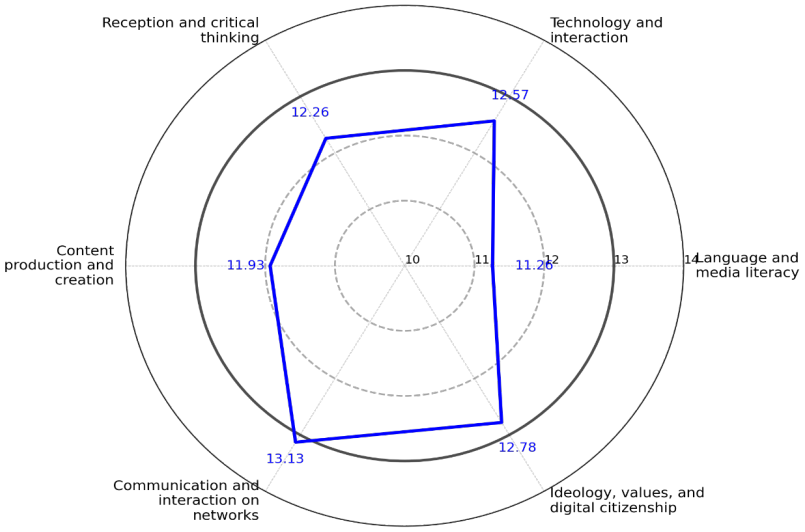
The data in Table 1 show that the dimensions evaluated have high or very high mean values, indicating an overall favourable level of media competencies among postgraduates. The averages of the dimensions fluctuate within a narrow range, from 11.26 to 13.13, and coefficients of variation ranging from 0.14 to 0.22, which are indicators of homogeneity in competency performance across the dimensions of the aforementioned competencies. Four of the medians are at the medium level close to the high level (12), and two exceed this value and are in the high range, indicating that most postgraduates do not obtain high averages, but there is stability in the responses due to the measures of variability, with no extreme values (maximum and minimum) distorting the distributions.

The values of the statisticians in the diverse dimensions reflect that the level of media competencies is not concentrated in a few individuals, but is distributed evenly across the group in the various dimensions, suggesting relatively homogeneous performance, as can be seen in the values of the coefficient of variation, despite the fact that the means of the dimensions, some are at the middle level and others at the high level, but close to the limit value. The dimension with the highest average is "communication and interaction in networks", which allows us to infer that postgraduates perceive themselves as competent to interact socially and collaboratively in digital environments, reinforcing the idea that social networks function as spaces for academic exchange and professional identity construction. This finding is in line with authors such as Scolari et al. (2018) and Otero Escobar (2024), who point out that young users not only consume but also actively participate in digital communication dynamics.

The other dimensions with higher averages, "ideology, values and digital citizenship" (M=12.78) and "technology and interaction" (M=12.57), show high values, reflecting significant progress in the conscious and ethical use of digital media, as well as in the instrumental mastery of technological tools; that is, digital tools are being put to good use, although there is still room for critical optimisation. In contrast, the lowest coefficient of variation (CV=0.14) in the ideological dimension reveals greater group consistency or homogeneity, that is, a shared assessment of the responsible and critical use of the media, in line with what García-Ruiz et al. (2021) define as critical digital citizenship.

Regarding the dimensions "language and media literacy" (M=11.26) and "content production and creation" (M=11.93), both show values that are within a medium range with a tendency towards competent. In the first case, this suggests that postgraduates understand media codes, but with limited critical depth; while in the second case, they share and create content, but a reflective or ethical intention has yet to be defined, which is equivalent to saying that they consume and interact more than they produce their own content, which coincides with previous studies that show a gap between active reception and creative production in the academic field, as well as influencing critical thinking, which must be addressed through media literacy (López & Aguaded, 2022; Murcia Rodríguez, 2025). This trend reinforces the need to strengthen training strategies that promote critical and ethical digital authorship, beyond simple consumption or dissemination.

Figure 1. Comparison of the means of the dimensions of media competencies in the use of social media, according to dimensions



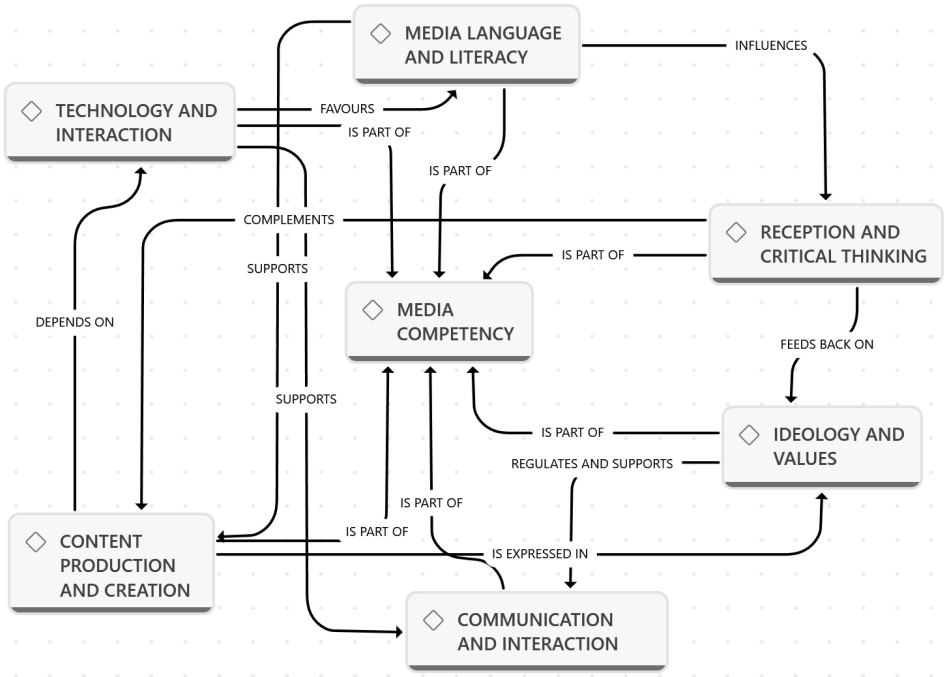
Note. Elaborated with data from respondents. Own elaboration, 2025.

With regard to the average, Figure 1 shows that most of the dimensions evaluated, four out of six, are at a high level of development, exceeding the value of 12 but close to the average value. In the case of the dimensions "technology and interaction" and "reception and critical thinking", they indicate an adequate use of digital tools, although there is still room for critical optimisation, but they can evaluate content and only sometimes question sources or biases. in "Communication and interaction in media" and "ideology, values and digital citizenship", there is evidence of the predominance of active and collaborative participation in digital spaces with responsible and ethical attitudes, even without a prosocial commitment being consolidated (Martínez-Cerdá et al., 2020).

In the dimensions "language and literacy" and "production and creation", both of which do not exceed the threshold of 12, they remain in the medium to high range, indicating that students interact actively but have not yet consolidated discursive analysis and critical authorship competencies on social media. However, despite the average scores being in the middle range, the overall average score for the sample was 73.93 points out of 96, placing it at a high level of development close to the average level of media competencies in the use of social media, with homogeneous performance as indicated by the overall coefficient of variation of 0.13.

The fact that graduates show a high level of development in media competencies in the use of social media indicates that they have sufficient skills to interact, participate and function effectively in digital environments, mainly in terms of communication, digital ethics and online collaboration. However, this level of development, which is close to the average, suggests that although they actively use social media, they have not yet achieved full critical and creative mastery, especially in areas such as the production of content for academic purposes or the in-depth interpretation of media language. In other words, they are not passive or merely technical users, but they still need to strengthen their reflective understanding and strategic use of social media as tools for building knowledge and digital citizenship; quantitative analysis is integrated with qualitative analysis.

Figure 2. Structural network of relationships between dimensions of media competencies in the use of social networks, according to dimensionse and comprehenliteracy



Source: Own elaboration based on data analysis based on the fundamentals of Ferrés & Piscitelli (2012).

Figure 2 systematises the conceptual network that articulates the dimensions of media competency proposed by Ferrés and Piscitelli (2012): technology and interaction, language and media literacy, reception and critical thinking, content production and creation, communication and interaction, ideology and values. The structure highlights a systemic logic in which each of the six dimensions are axiologically and functionally interrelated.

Based on the analysis of the data, it can be seen that "technology and interaction" is at the base of the system, a dimension that enables the development of the other dimensions and is at a high level of

development, contributing directly or indirectly to the other dimensions also being at a high level. Emerging codes, such as academic use and collaboration with digital multifunctionality, reveal the instrumental assimilation of technological tools that help achieve autonomy and productivity in educational areas and can be extended to work and personal environments. This starting dimension supports and favours "language and media literacy", which is at a medium level of development (Table 1, Figure 1) and is oriented towards the conscious use of expressive resources, formats, and modes of digital communication. The development of this dimension would imply the development of the others, according to the relationships in Figure 2.

The expressive axis of the system, formed by "language and media literacy", influences "content production and creation", and both are at a medium level of development. These results show that media competencies go beyond technical literacy, as they involve the strategic selection of codes, media, and discursive styles according to the communicative purpose. Participants demonstrate varying degrees of awareness of the appropriateness of the pedagogical message, planning and formal correctness, which suggests media literacy framed within reflexivity and creativity (Pérez-Tornero & Celot, 2019).

In the field of ethical criticism, the structural network highlights a strong interaction between key concepts: reception and critical thinking, communication and interaction, and ideology and values. The first is associated with verifying sources, not spreading manipulative content, and promoting a culture of peace (López & Aguaded, 2022). The second refers to ethical practice in the digital context, incorporating codes such as communicative ethics, harm prevention, and social responsibility; while ideology and values act as a cross-cutting dimension that guides the whole towards prosocial commitment, empathy, and digital citizenship (Martínez-Cerdá et al., 2020).

Table 2. Categorical summary of findings on emerging dimensions, categories and subcategories of media competencies in the use of social networks

Dimension	Emerging category	Emerging subcategories
Technology and interaction (TIC)	Functional appropriation of technology	Academic management Productivity and communication Digital transactions
Language and media literacy (LEN)	Expressive and strategic use of media language	Multimodality Appropriateness of the message Personal conditions/context
Reception and critical thinking (REC).	Digital critical thinking	Verification and contrast Non-dissemination/reporting Protection and culture of peace
Content production and creation (PROD)	Ethical and self-regulated publishing	Clarity and relevance Formal correctness Care for the audience
Communication and interaction (COM)	Ethical and responsible communication	Ethics and coexistence Prevention of harm Social responsibility
Ideology and values (IVAL)	Citizen and prosocial engagement in digital environments	Promotion of values Role models and citizenship Prosocial inspiration

Source: Own elaboration based on qualitative analysis, 2025

Table 2 shows the framework that displays the hierarchy of categories, subcategories and initial codes that emerged from the qualitative analysis. It shows that media competency constitutes a relational system in which the technical (technology and interaction), expressive (language and production) and ethical-critical (reception, communication and ideology) dimensions feed into each other to form a comprehensive communicative practice. Each node reflects the dynamics between action, reflection and value, confirming that media competency is not limited to technological mastery, but also incorporates critical, ethical and transformative capacity in contemporary digital environments.

With regard to the "technology and interaction" (ICT) dimension, the analysis yields the emerging category of "functional appropriation of technology", which is associated with sub-dimensions such as academic management, productivity and communication, and digital transactions, as evidenced by two participants: "I frequently use digital tools such as Google Drive, Canva, Mindomo, Kahoot, and Genially to develop and share educational materials that allow me to use various templates" (Interviewee E-16-

ICT) (academic management); “I use tools and platforms for entertainment, moving money...” (E13-ICT) (productivity and communication). In other words, the analysis reflects a functional appropriation of technology for academic, work and personal purposes, from a critical standpoint (Kačinová & Sádaba, 2022; Portugal Escobar, 2021).

Regarding the dimension of “language and media literacy” (LEN), the analysis revealed the category “expressive and strategic use of media language” with subcategories such as multimodality, appropriateness to the message and personal conditions/context, as observed in the narrative of two participants: "Communication must combine text and images, because they have significant communicative power, depending on the appropriate selection made according to the purpose...” (E11-LEN) (multimodal combination); “It depends mostly on my mood, how busy I am when doing an activity, and whether I have more time...” (E9-LEN) (adequacy to the context). All of this demonstrates the strategic use of media language to achieve clear and attractive communication, which promotes autonomy, creativity and active citizenship (Alcolea-Díaz et al., 2020; Sánchez-López et al., 2021).

Regarding the dimension of “reception and critical thinking” (REC), the analysis reveals the emerging category of digital critical thinking and its respective subcategories: verification and contrast, non-dissemination and contrast/denunciation, and protection and culture of peace. As can be seen in the respective citations of the subcategories: “When I identify a publication that seeks to manipulate or emotionally influence people, I first analyse the source and verify the information before believing it” (E7-REC); "If I confirm that the publication has a manipulative intent, I avoid sharing it or reacting impulsively. In some cases, I may report it or warn others...” (E12-REC); “When faced with information that seeks to emotionally manipulate people, one should avoid spreading it and even warn of the damage it can cause...” (E6-REC). This demonstrates critical thinking in analysing, verifying and avoiding the dissemination of false information in line with a culture of peace (Muringa & Adjin-Tettey, 2024).

With regard to “content production and creation” (PROD), the analysis revealed the category “ethical and self-regulated publication” with the subcategories: clarity and relevance, formal correctness and care for the audience, and their respective testimonies: “I don't usually share information publicly. In any case, if I do share something, I determine who can see it, and that depends on the content” (E10-PROD); “Before posting something on social media, I consider the objective and target audience, the appropriate tone and language, privacy and security...” (E5-PROD); “I carefully review what I am going to post, from the spelling to the message I want to convey. I also verify the data I am going to share...” (E18-PROD). (E18-PROD). These discourses and results reveal ethical practices in the creation and dissemination of digital content, where users and consumers of information decide to make an impact through more active participation with transformative intent, becoming prosumers (Halpern, 2024; Muringa & Adjin-Tettey, 2024; Park, 2024).

For the “communication and interaction” (COM) dimension, the analysis determined the emerging category “ethical and responsible communication” with its sub-dimensions of ethics and coexistence, harm prevention and social responsibility, and their respective quotes: “I believe that the circulation of rumours or offensive content on social media is very harmful because it can damage people's reputations and generate conflicts...” (E10-COM); “The circulation of offensive content on social media comes from people without a culture of coexistence and reflects that learning is at stake...” (E14-COM); “I believe that it harms people because it affects their self-esteem and can damage their integrity. Nowadays, this type of information is common...” (E3-COM). According to these discourses and results, ethical responsibility and respect in digital interaction are clearly emphasised, in line with sustainable practices (García Montero, 2025; Portugal Escobar, 2021).

With regard to the “ideology and values” (IVAL) dimension, the data analysis identified the emerging category “citizen and prosocial engagement in digital environments” with its subcategories of promotion of values, models of citizenship and prosocial inspiration associated with the following versions: “Social media, when used well, can promote positive values such as empathy, respect, inclusion and solidarity...” (E16-VAL); “On social media such as Facebook and Instagram, there is valuable content, especially on educational pages or those of teachers who want to share...” (E2-VAL); "I would like to use social media to share messages that inspire respect, empathy and solidarity. I would also use it to support campaigns that help those in need..." (E18-VAL). (E18-VAL). The results and data show a prosocial commitment through the promotion of values and digital citizenship based on educating aesthetic sensitivity towards computer and communication media. (Ferrés & Piscitelli, 2012).

The incorporation of media competencies into postgraduate training requires curricular innovation, considering this competence as a fundamental element of the graduate profile, which must be achieved through innovative teaching proposals (García-Ruiz, 2023). In this regard, media literacy should be implemented considering that its foundation is based on dimensions associated with indicators referring to knowledge, skills, and attitudes of the aforementioned competency (Melgarejo-Moreno, 2021). Thus, media competencies in the use of social media will bring benefits to postgraduates in the academic, professional, social, and ethical spheres, such as improving the quality of academic and research output, promoting independent learning and continuous updating, developing professional identity, optimising academic visibility, and promoting ethical digital citizenship.

In summary, the social networks analysed reveal that media competencies are structured as an ecosystem of interdependent knowledge: technology enables expression, expression requires critical thinking, and critical thinking is based on democratic values, which should be the result of critical media literacy in postgraduate education and should be promoted in the curriculum (Halpern, 2024). This framework coincides with the approaches of Pérez-Rodríguez & Delgado-Ponce (2022), who affirm that media education should be oriented towards transformative action and social responsibility, integrating thought, emotion, and ethics in the use of media. Thus, the figures presented allow us to understand critical media competencies as a practice of postgraduate students who aspire to be conscious, reflective digital citizens committed to the common good of their environment, which implies emphasising curricular policies that address "transmedia literacy" (Deschênes, 2024), where the curriculum includes participatory strategies for student users, who move from being consumers to "prosumers" of content, integrating extracurricular learning with curricular learning in order to optimise postgraduate training.

4. Conclusions

The results of the study show that postgraduate students have a high, with a tendency towards medium, level of media competencies in the use of social networks, with clear strengths in communicative interaction and digital responsibility, but with limitations in the critical understanding of media language, which is the basis of the other dimensions, thus limiting their development and the conscious production of content. This profile reveals that social media is used primarily as a space for connection and participation, rather than as a tool for the reflective and creative construction of knowledge. Consequently, postgraduate education must move towards pedagogical models that promote not only the instrumental use of digital platforms, but also their use for academic, civic and transformative purposes, based on the optimal use of language and media literacy.

Likewise, the study found that media competencies among postgraduates show heterogeneous development depending on the dimension evaluated: while interaction and participation in social media reach high levels, critical analysis and content production show moderate progress, which indicates a digital practice more oriented towards consumption and sociability than towards reflection and meaningful creation. The perceptions of the participants confirm that social networks are valued as spaces for learning and identity building, although their academic use still depends on the pedagogical intent of the curricula. Data triangulation revealed that variables such as disciplinary area and professional experience influence the type of use made of networks, generating gaps in the degree of critical appropriation of digital media.

In relation to the quantitative guideline, the results show an average development of media competencies in dimensions located at the instrumental level, but also at the critical, expressive, and transformative levels of media use, as is the case with the use of language and media literacy, with the production and creation of content, which indicates that students handle the platforms with relative technical and social competence, although with less depth of reflection and authorship. These results indicate that media competencies in postgraduates should be strengthened, given the responsibility that this level demands, both in the academic and research fields.

With regard to the qualitative objective, the interviews revealed that postgraduates perceive social networks as useful tools for informal learning, academic exchange and professional development, although they recognise tensions between personal and academic use, as well as a lack of institutional guidance to enhance these practices for educational purposes. The fact that the language and media literacy dimension is at a medium level of development does not constitute a strength for the development and positioning of the other dimensions because technology and interaction are at the base of the media competency dimension system.

In relation to contrasting approaches, triangulation revealed discrepancies between subjective perceptions of competence and objective evidence from scores: participants who considered themselves expert users obtained average scores in critical analysis and production, especially older participants or those from disciplines less closely linked to digital communication. This confirms the existence of generational and disciplinary gaps in the critical appropriation of social media, which can be addressed through media literacy in an era of hybrid learning.

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