Presence of digital social networks in educational practices of law course

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Abstract: Digital social networks are intensively present in people's lives, a fact that cannot be ignored in the training process within undergraduate courses. The use of digital technologies in educational practices is already a reality; however, how social networks have permeated the daily life of university classrooms is a topic that needs to be studied. Young people use computers networks to access and learn from different media. In fields such as Law, there are professionals and professors who share content and present themselves personally and professionally on digital social networks, many of whom have a significant number of followers. In this sense, this article aims to analyze and discuss how faculty and students of a Law course perceive the repercussions of social networks educational process. The qualitative research used questionnaires and interviews as data collection tools. The study involved 10 professors and 123 students. The results indicated that participants recognize the influence and uses of digital social networks in their personal, academic, and professional lives, as well as their impacts on teaching and learning processes.
Keywords: digital technologies; legal education; professor; educational process.

1 Introduction

Digital technologies are present in all areas of human life, influencing communication, work, and social relationships. As tools that mediate activities, they carry individual and collective meanings. Among the countless resources made available by technological advancements, including applications and platforms that enable interaction, there are those referred to as digital social networks.

The formation of what we are as a species has been woven through the collective relationships we have established since the beginning of time. We are biological and social beings who need others to survive and to shape ourselves as humans. According to Vygotsky (2009), the subjective constitution of the human being is mediated by symbolic instruments (signs) that represent reality. These culturally

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based instruments/signs include verbal and non-verbal language and even technological tools, acting as psychological tools that expand our capacity for understanding, communication, and interaction with the world.

From a Vygotskian perspective, this means that social interactions play a fundamental role in the acquisition of knowledge, as it is through living and communicating with others that individuals construct and internalize new knowledge. Thus, the concept of a social network, whether physical or digital, is intrinsically linked to the very formation of the human being. Regarding digital social networks, access occurs predominantly through mobile devices, which are present in the classroom. It is worth noting that, in 2025, Law No. 15.100/25 was enacted, prohibiting their use—specifically personal devices—by students in basic education schools in Brazil (Brasil, 2025). The law further states that electronic devices may only be used for pedagogical purposes and under the supervision of an education professional. This legal directive was created in response to warnings from teachers and researchers regarding excessive screen use among children and young people, which has been compromising their cognitive and emotional development.

Although this law does not apply to higher education, we understand that educational institutions, in addition to incorporating digital technologies into educational practices when necessary, must promote reflections on their impacts on people's lives. This is because the issue is not limited to instrumental or technical use, but involves understanding them as sociocultural artifacts that affect humanity's way of being and existing. In higher education, digital technologies are already consolidated in both in-person and distance learning formats, keeping pace with their evolution in order to train professionals connected to a digital society. According to Valente and Almeida (2021, p. 45), "[…] digital information and communication technologies (DICTs) are already structurally embedded in higher education, expanding pedagogical possibilities and promoting a more flexible, interactive, and student-centered education." However, some technological resources, such as the use of social networks in the university context, still deserve analysis.

In the field of Law, there is an abundance of professionals producing digital legal content, many of whom have a significant number of followers. This phenomenon may influence teaching practices, as law students and professors make use of such information available on social networks. Hogemann (2018) argues that access to this

type of content can promote legal education aligned with an information-based society, enabling students to develop skills for legal research in digital environments.

However, this is still a relatively new phenomenon in academia, which leads us to question how it is being addressed and considered by law professors and students. The content available on social networks may be presented superficially, potentially compromising the quality of legal knowledge. Considering this issue, the general objective of this study is to analyze and discuss how law professors and students perceive the repercussions of social networks in the educational process.

To understand this phenomenon, a study was conducted as part of a master's degree in education, which aimed at analyzing and discussing how professors and students of a Law program perceive the repercussions of social networks in the educational process. This quantitative and qualitative (quanti-quali) research sought to understand the role of social networks in the subjective constitution of participants. This approach was chosen because, initially, we sought information from a larger number of subjects (professors and students) and, subsequently, delved deeper into the topic. According to Gatti and André (2010, p. 30), this approach can "[…] respond to the challenge of understanding the formative/forming aspects of the human being, their relationships, and cultural constructions, in their group, community, or personal dimensions."

This is an exploratory study, as it sought to provide greater knowledge about the impact of social networks on legal education from the perspective of professors and students. The empirical field chosen for this research was the undergraduate Law program of a university located in the municipality of São Bento do Sul, state of Santa Catarina. The program has been offered by the institution for 25 years, serving São Bento do Sul and nearby municipalities.

A questionnaire and a semi-structured interview were used for data collection. According to May (2004), questionnaires are useful for collecting data when aiming to reach a larger number of participants—in this case, law students and professors. Interviews, on the other hand, help to understand how individuals perceive and act in society (May, 2004), and in this research, they allowed for further exploration of issues that could not be addressed solely through the questionnaire responses.

At the time of the research, in 2024, the undergraduate Law program was offered in the evening, covering the 1st through 10th semesters, and in the morning for

the 5th year of the program, totaling 205 enrolled students and 16 professors. After approval of the project by the Ethics Committee (approval number 6.427.559), a Google Forms questionnaire was sent to which 10 professors and 123 students responded. Subsequently, to explore certain issues in more depth, in-person individual interviews were scheduled and conducted with 5 professors and 10 students.

The data generated from the questionnaires and interviews formed the corpus analyzed using Content Analysis (Bardin, 2016), developed in three phases: a) pre-analysis; b) material exploration and results processing; and c) inference and interpretation. The first phase, aimed at organizing the research, consisted of compiling and describing the questionnaire responses and identifying pre-indicators from the interview transcripts. In the exploration phase, the indicators were identified and related to the questionnaire results. This article will present and discuss two of the categories. Next, we will address digital culture, social networks, and educational practices in higher education. Then, the data analysis will be presented, followed by the final considerations.

2 Digital Culture and Social Networks

Digital culture is characterized by the interweaving of digital technologies and human beings in both virtual and physical spaces, affecting our way of living and learning. Human history has been shaped by inventions, techniques, ideas, and knowledge accumulated and transmitted over time. This legacy takes on functions and meanings in human life, shaping social and cultural practices. Culture is an inherent phenomenon to individuals, as it is through the production of symbols, languages, and meanings that the modes of existence of a society are formed (Chauí, 1995). It is present in works of art, literature, architecture, and technology, as well as intertwined in language, traditions, and social structures.

We live immersed in culture on a daily basis, as it manifests in our ways of being and is continuously re-signified. Through our actions, interactions, and traditions, we actively participate in the construction and ongoing renewal of this collective legacy. The concept of culture is not related to biological transmission but to social learning; that is, it is defined by the way of life of a collective, which leads to human development. To emphasize diversity and multiplicity, it is more accurate to speak not of a single culture but of cultures. According to Chauí (1995), culture is the way in which a human

social group organizes itself to conduct its existence, creating symbols and meanings. Thus, one cannot speak of the forms of expression, organization, and ways of life of different social groups without acknowledging this plurality.

From this perspective, we encounter digital culture, a term derived from the concept of *cyberculture* proposed by Lévy (1999, p. 17), which refers to "[…] the set of (material and intellectual) techniques, practices, attitudes, ways of thinking, and values that develop alongside the growth of cyberspace." For the author, global access to and exchange of information result in a collective and participatory movement, giving rise to new forms of communication made possible by digital technologies.

In contemporary society, according to Castells (1999), digital technologies have the potential for global reach, integrating communication and interaction into processes that can be conceived, developed, and re-signified by human beings. Communication, intrinsically linked to culture, influences historical systems—such as beliefs and codes—which are impacted and transformed by digital technologies, leading to cultural changes.

Digital culture is one of the core expressions of the network society, being inseparable from how social, political, and economic organization takes place. By enabling the formation of virtual communities and promoting the reconfiguration of cultural and communication practices, digital culture breaks with one-way communication models (Castells, 2003).

In this perspective, Kenski (2013) leads us to reflect on contemporary culture, which is profoundly marked by the presence of digital technologies in people's daily lives. According to the author, we live in a society characterized by interactivity, interconnection, and interrelation among individuals, as well as the connection of these individuals to various virtual spaces of information, communication, and production, which involves the use of digital technologies.

Reflecting on the mediating role of instruments and signs in the formation of human subjectivity, as described by Vygotsky (2009), we understand, based on Castells (1999), that the digital culture in which we are immersed stands out for its broad ability to incorporate and embrace diverse forms of cultural expression. This characteristic provokes significant changes in social processes and in how individuals, both collectively and individually, perceive themselves and interpret the world.

In this digital world, language is characterized as *hypermediatic*, formed by the integration of multiple language systems. According to Santaella (2013, p. 16), it "[…] results from the convergence of media and the development of digital technologies, providing a new form of expression that simultaneously combines text, image, sound, and interactivity." Therefore, hypermedia language develops within cyberculture, where traditional media merge with new digital technologies, enabling non-linear and interactive communication experiences.

Computing has evolved rapidly, with continuous developments and improvements in hardware, software, and Artificial Intelligence, envisioned as a support for intellectual technologies that enhance human cognitive functions. For Lévy (1993, p. 31), information technologies "[…] are both instruments for thought and supports for its externalized work, allowing certain cognitive functions, such as memory, imagination, or reasoning, to be enhanced." These technologies are now available on mobile devices that seem like an extension of the human body, affecting our way of being and living, thus weaving a new culture: the digital one.

According to Bortolazzo (2016, p. 3), "[…] the use and appropriation of digital technologies are cultural productions of a given society, marked by its historical and contingent character." The author considers that digital culture materializes in every social space as activities of varied and potential meanings, stimulating a plurality of new ways of understanding the world and its social relations (Bortolazzo, 2016).

> This is a moment in history when digital technologies can no longer be analyzed solely as tools, but as active participants in our culture. The need to problematize is urgent, especially because digital technologies themselves are becoming increasingly invisible and integrated into the social fabric (Bortolazzo, 2016, p. 13).

The various cultural expressions represent an invaluable potential, as cultures are a dimension of existence built upon shared meanings, understood as "[…] concepts, ideas, and images that enable similarity in the way of feeling, thinking, and interpreting the world" (Santaella, 2013, p. 7). For the author, these interpretive efforts underpin the constitution of cultures, demonstrating that social activities are cultural because they express meanings attributed by human beings (Santaella, 2013).

The meanings built and reformulated over time give rise to cultural expressions that remain open to the dynamic historical interweaving of differing visions, behaviors, knowledge, techniques, and technologies. This cultural fabric expands, reaching and

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transforming various dimensions of social life, including the school, its role, methodologies, and practices.

Within this context, we find digital social networks. As early as the 1990s, Castells defined a network as

> […] a set of interconnected nodes. A node is the point at which a curve intersects itself. What a node specifically represents depends on the type of network under consideration: it may be biological networks, computer networks, communication networks, cooperation networks, financial networks, political networks, transportation networks, etc. (Castells, 1999, p. 501).

According to Boyd and Ellison (2007, as cited in Recuero, 2009, p. 102), these are "[…] systems that allow: i) the construction of a persona through a profile or personal page; ii) interaction through comments; and iii) the public display of each actor's social network." In other words, they are connections made between people and/or groups that enable bonds based on common interests. From this perspective, Boyd and Ellison (2007, as cited in Recuero, 2009) argue that for a social network to exist, a process of appropriation is necessary—one that occurs through the use of available tools, the structure of websites, contact lists, and the records of conversational exchanges.

Social networks, particularly those with massive reach, are maintained by systems controlled by large technology companies seeking profit, leading users to spend long periods connected. Their business model is sustained mainly through advertising and the sale of user data (Santos, 2022). According to the author, user engagement is defined by the amount of interactions—both positive and negative—generated on the platforms.

Another relevant aspect to consider from a critical perspective on social networks is the so-called *digital colonialism*, which warns of the concentration of power and control over data by large corporations. In his book *Big Tech: The Rise of Data and the Death of Politics*, Morozov (2018, p. 45) states that "[…] the new imperialism is digital: large technology companies control global infrastructures, collect personal data on a planetary scale, and shape our social and political interactions." According to the author, a few international corporations' control digital infrastructures, creating user dependency, collecting data, and shaping consumption habits (Morozov, 2018).

Regarding the use of such corporate platforms in academia, Morozov (2018) warns that it may constitute a space for data extraction and the formation of commercial

profiles. Thus, there is a risk to student development if they fail to recognize the ethical and legal limits of using personal data and if their critical perspective on what they produce and consume on social networks remains limited.

On the other hand, social networks offer various benefits, such as facilitating real-time communication, sharing ideas, accessing diverse information and content, and promoting products and services. For Santos (2022), it is necessary to consider these benefits and their implications for daily life and education, as each of us, in some way, is entangled in these technological dynamics in both personal and professional spheres.

3 Educational Practices in Higher Education

Educational practice is a social phenomenon, carried out by historical subjects in a dialectical relationship with reality. Teachers and students involved in this practice seek to construct and reframe knowledge, values, skills, and abilities, mediated by language, social interaction, and, often, the use of technology. The concept of educational practice broadly refers to the processes and actions aimed at the transmission, construction, and development of knowledge. It is a human action that seeks to promote the acquisition of knowledge and values in order to ensure the organization of society (Libâneo, 2013).

In the educational setting, Franco (2016, p. 536) defines it as the pedagogical practices that occur "to bring about educational processes," that is, the procedures developed to promote student learning while taking into account social demands. We agree with the author in stating that "[…] pedagogical practices should be structured as critical instances of educational practices, with a view to the collective transformation of the meanings and significance of learning" (Franco, 2016, p. 605). In the current context, the digital culture to which we belong becomes an essential aspect to be considered when proposing pedagogical activities.

The rapid technological evolution and transformations in labor relations have reached Higher Education, which, for over three decades, has permanently incorporated digital technologies into the educational process. The possibility of offering distance learning and using these technologies in on-campus courses has required new pedagogical approaches. Thus, higher education encompasses educational practices using applications and platforms to deepen and enhance student

training. In this scenario, teachers have sought professional development to meet the demands imposed by society in order to transform and reframe their teaching practice.

Academic curriculum proposals have sought to keep pace with technological evolution so that the training of future professionals aligns with the demands of the labor market and personal life. The integration of digital technologies into the Law degree is an urgent necessity, as Hogemann (2018, p. 113) states:

> […] technological advances involving everything from data processing and virtual communication channels to AI—artificial intelligence—already impact the field of Law, both in the pedagogical sphere and in professional practice, as an objective and unquestionable reality.

This entails preparing for a life increasingly integrated with the digital world, recognizing that the relationship between human beings and technology goes beyond functional use, encompassing aspects of dependency, knowledge construction, and various particularities that permeate individual experience. In the legal field, the Brazilian procedural system has most case files available digitally, with few remaining in physical format. When not initiated directly in digital format, cases are converted to this modality, and the entire procedure is carried out through computers and electronic platforms. This example illustrates the need to integrate digital technologies into undergraduate Law courses.

Legal education has been marked by a traditional, content-heavy approach focused on memorizing laws and codes, with little openness to reflective and critical thinking. This teaching practice is "[…] established through rituals, with rhetoric as one of the required skills" (Carvalho; Pesce, 2021, p. 107), since most professors in the program have no pedagogical training. According to the authors:

> In most cases, university professors are law graduates, not education graduates, which means they did not receive pedagogical training during their degree to prepare them for teaching. Their historical background often rests on specific knowledge in their field of expertise and professional experience in the area in which they graduated (Carvalho; Pesce, 2021, p. 108).

Teaching practice is shaped by the experiences, learning, concepts, and beliefs the professor developed during their own academic training. Moreover, professors who also work as legal practitioners embody both professional identities. Regarding the National Curricular Guidelines for Law Degree Programs, Resolution CES/CNE no. 5/2018 establishes the need to offer a program that promotes integral and interdisciplinary training, linking theory, practice, ethics, and students' social

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commitment. Therefore, legal education should go beyond mere content transmission. It should prepare professionals who are critical, ethical, and ready to face social challenges. The same resolution mentions digital technologies as an element to be integrated into the curriculum (Brasil, 2018).

Hogemann (2018) states that integrating digital technologies into legal education involves teachers' recognition of the need to prepare graduates for professional demands in the digital environment. For the author, professors must combine technical knowledge of digital technologies with pedagogical aspects, enhancing more interactive, collaborative, and contemporary educational practices.

Regarding social networks, Lorenzo (2013) argues that their potential should be considered in lesson planning, especially as a means of facilitating interaction and collective knowledge production. In higher education, students bring their smartphones with them, allowing them to access content but also distracting them with unrelated topics on various networks during class (Santos, 2022). This prevents them from focusing on both the professor and the pedagogical activity, as the desire to be connected and present online diverts their attention from what they are supposed to learn.

The distraction caused by constant connectivity has already been the subject of numerous research studies. Kuznekoff and Titsworth (2013) found that a significant number of students use their smartphones to stay connected to social networks or play online games during class. Their results showed that these students demonstrated lower learning outcomes than those who did not use mobile devices. Dal'agnol *et al*. (2019) found that 97.7% of the 88 higher education students participating in their research were connected to social networks during class. The researchers stated:

> […] the educational process should lead to a change in students' attitudes toward using social networks in the classroom, but it is up to the professor to point out ways to use them pedagogically, providing access to content related to topics discussed in class (Dal'agnol *et al.*, 2019, p. 135).

Thus, we believe that professors can engage students in reflecting on and establishing agreements regarding mobile device use during class, in line with the guidelines of Law no. 15,100, of January 13, 2025 (Brasil, 2015). We acknowledge that this is no easy task, as students may still become distracted even when disconnected. We emphasize that when professors propose activities using digital technologies, they

should make students aware that algorithms and social networks can present unreliable information.

Azzari and Mayer (2022) sought to examine, based on excerpts from posts by two teachers' TikTok profiles, the influencer role these professors begin to play when they adopt the practice of producing and sharing videos, whether educational or not. In analyzing some posts, the authors identified the spectacularization and influencer celebrity status adopted by these teachers. They further note that, while some content is educational, there are no guarantees it aids students' learning process.

Professors who act as influencers, Azzari and Mayer (2022) warn, create a persona that becomes a spectacle, with creativity turned into a commodity, participating in the complex dynamics of online communities. Thus, professors not only seek to influence but are also shaped by the same mechanisms they employ to exert influence, constructing and reconstructing their subjectivities in the process.

In a study on TikTok use in Law courses, Maria and Porto (2023) found that most participating students frequently accessed the app outside of class, but believed it could influence their academic studies. This finding suggests that professors should consider using it in a pedagogical and intentional way.

In addition to TikTok, the authors argue that other social networks can also be incorporated into educational practices to foster student interaction and collective knowledge construction. Technological resources can contribute to less dogmatic legal education, aligning more closely with the goals of training young people immersed in digital culture (Maria; Porto, 2023).

In the Law field, there is a significant number of professors and/or professionals who use social networks to promote their work, producing legal content for large audiences. This initiative, in some way, boosts their freelance legal careers by increasing visibility beyond teaching roles. These contents are accessed by both professors and students, as specialized networks can help in information searches and facilitate learning.

> A relationship network aimed at a particular audience creates opportunities for participants, who can debate shared interests. These possibilities are limitless, and users may focus on exchanging experiences, collectively building knowledge, and strengthening bonds within the community (Lorenzo, 2013, p. 85).

Therefore, it is about considering social networks in educational practices as possible tools that can aid student learning, while emphasizing that they should be used with specific criteria and guidelines. Professors must consider various factors when incorporating them into classes, such as false, superficial, or poorly reflected information, which can undermine student learning.

4 Analysis and Discussion of Data

Regarding the profile of the research participants, most of the student respondents (103) are between 17 and 25 years old, nine students are between 26 and 30 years old, six are between 31 and 40 years old, three are between 41 and 50 years old, and only two are over 51 years old. This is an expected profile, consistent with projections made in higher education policies, in which students enter higher education after completing high school.

As for the professors, the majority (6) are over 50 years old, three are between 41 and 50, and only one is between 31 and 40 years old. In terms of years of experience in higher education, seven professors have been teaching for more than 11 years, and three for between 4 and 10 years. Regarding academic qualifications, most have a *stricto sensu* postgraduate degree (two with a doctorate and four with a master's degree), with two holding a specialization and two holding a postdoctoral degree. This profile indicates that the professors who participated in the research are older, more experienced, and well-qualified, demonstrating extensive teaching experience and academic trajectory. Regarding whether they practice law alongside teaching, seven professors stated that they do. The profile of the responding professors shows that a significant portion of the faculty (at the time of the research there were sixteen professors) consists of liberal professionals — that is, as defined by Behrens (2011), "teacher-professionals" who combine teaching with another profession. This is a very common situation in the context of higher education in Brazil.

The first category to be analyzed is "Presence of Professors and Students on Social Media", which can be observed in the responses from both professors and students mentioning the use of various applications such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Messenger. It is evident that being on social media is part of the participants' daily lives, although most say they do not produce content but only

consume what is made available on the mentioned platforms. Only two reported producing legal content on Instagram.

The research participants listed various purposes for accessing social media. The majority of students (97.6%) seek general information and entertainment, 90.2% use it to contact friends and family, 66.7% for academic research, 20.3% follow professors/legal professionals, and 15% share their experiences as students. For professors, the purposes indicated by nine respondents were to seek general information, entertainment, and contact with friends and family; seven indicated seeking specific information in their teaching area; and six for conducting academic research.

We note that some students are interested in following professors and/or legal professionals. When asked whether they follow their professors, the majority of students (67%) said yes. This finding is significant when compared to the relationship students draw between the content posted by professors and the quality of their classes. For more than half of the respondents (47.9% to some degree and 20.3% completely), what a professor posts—whether personal or professional—influences how the student perceives their teaching performance. Only 27.6% believe it has little relation, and 38.2% see no connection. These numbers indicate that a professor's digital presence on social media, even if personal, affects students' perceptions of them as educators.

Professors reported that they follow other professors and/or legal professionals mainly as a way to find information in their fields and to update the content of the subjects they teach. This shows an interest in accessing content produced by peers on social media, in addition to academic websites. However, when asked if they produce content for social media, most professors said they use it more as a way to promote their legal work than their teaching. This suggests that professors are still more consumers than producers of social media content, raising the question of whether they address this issue with their students. According to Lorenzo (2013), the difficulty for professors lies in integrating internet and social media resources in an intentional and strategic way to enhance the teaching and learning process.

On the other hand, exposure to different profiles can lead to greater engagement, as expressed by Professor 3 (2024): "[...] *these posts motivate me when I see a professor, when I see an author of legal works explaining something. I confess*

that I feel challenged, motivated to get involved in that as well. This statement illustrates the appeal of participating in the digital world, which is inherently tied to one of social media's main principles: engagement. According to Santos (2022), the use of algorithms aims to keep individuals increasingly connected for commercial purposes. By offering an endless stream of posts tailored to users' interests and aspirations, platforms create the desire to engage and participate.

The second category, "The Role of Social Media in the Educational Process", sought to highlight participants' perceptions about the meaning of social media in relation to their roles as professors and students. Education no longer happens only in the classroom, as evidenced in the students' responses. The majority of respondents (61.2%) said that some of their professors post legal content on social media, while 38.8% said they do not. This suggests that not all students follow their professors (as shown earlier, only 67% do), and not all professors post about legal topics, as indicated in the professors' responses.

When asked about promoting their work, five professors reported posting links to articles, legal news, videos, and academic publications, with only one stating that they share classroom content, in-class activities, and materials that might help students. Two professors do not post at all, and three did not respond. This suggests that social media is underused by professors for producing and sharing content related to their field. We must consider that not all professors produce content due to lack of time, disinterest, limited technical skills, or personal choice.

Among the 10 professors interviewed, six said they try to connect with and follow students on social media, while four do not adopt this practice. This suggests that some professors do not see social media as a technological tool that could bring them closer to students. Interaction in this space can help build bonds beyond the classroom, which may be especially meaningful for the generation to which most students belong (Dal'agnol *et al.*, 2019).

When asked about the usefulness of social media in teaching and learning, 70% of professors considered it useful, while 30% did not have an opinion. This reinforces the earlier finding that some professors still do not see social media as a relevant educational resource. Santos (2022) emphasizes the importance of continuous teacher training, which should be offered by educational institutions to meet current job

demands. In a context shaped by algorithms and social media, professors must guide students in finding reliable information, especially from these digital environments.

As for whether professors believe their presence on social media affects their relationship with students, three think it has little impact, two believe it has no impact, four said it affects the relationship greatly, and one was unsure. Two professors who said there is no impact explained that their interaction with students occurs only in the classroom. Only one professor indicated the influence as positive, noting that social media helps in staying in touch with students. This suggests that, although professors consider social media important for education, most do not integrate it effectively into their teaching practice.

One possible reason is that professors feel overburdened and invaded during their time off work. As Professor 4 (2024) put it:

> *We don't have time for anything anymore; we must be practically at the student's disposal. In today's customer-like relationship that universities—especially private ones—have, that's what it's like. It's complicated; we have to be available to mark attendance, solve problems, oh professor, I couldn't hand this in,' 'I forgot, here it is, can you accept it late?' So, I think that's a complicated situation.*

Antunes (2018) warns about changes in the world of work in the digital era, noting that despite appearances of modernity and innovation, online and digital work often conceals precarious teaching conditions. The author introduces the concept of the "digital slave," in which there is no physical coercion but intense exploitation through hyperconnectivity, long hours, and low pay.

In this context, some institutions require professors to maintain a social media profile to share educational material and, consequently, promote the institution's brand, consolidating or expanding public recognition. Beyond teaching duties (lesson planning, research, studying, preparing and grading exams, administrative records, meetings, and training courses), professors are expected to be digital content producers. This new task adds to their workload, as it must be done at home, extending working hours and affecting private life. In general, digital technologies have intensified "[…] the use of labor power through a supposed technological revolution, even producing evidence of the efficiency of the means for the purposes established […]" (Barreto, 2004, p. 1194).

It is known that some professors and Law professionals are recognized for posting reliable content and have many followers. The research participants indicated that they often follow them. Regarding whether accessing these posts contributes to their learning process, 57.1% of students said it helps deepen topics beyond those addressed in class; 35.7% said it helps them learn current class content; and 10.7% said they use it to review for exams.

As Student 122 (2024) explained:

> Sometimes you don't have a clear concept, and then a professor gives you a concept with a little diagram, you know? It's something that took me five classes to learn and still wasn't clear, but with a basic diagram, a post, I can understand it really well.

Analyzing the students' responses, there are several indicators showing that social media can help in the educational process. Participation on social media and interaction with other colleagues and professors help complement classroom learning. Access to online profiles, whether for specific content or to interact with people working in relevant fields, impacts student development. As Student 51 (2024) stated: "*What we end up seeing, that's something nice, we end up wanting to reflect on in our own lives.*"

Professors also recognize this phenomenon, noting that content posted by professors and/or Law professionals is accessed by students and influences their learning, as stated by Professor 3 (2024):

> Oh yes, yes. For example, I don't use it, as I said, I try to associate the institution with the person, but it affects the information. For example, when someone from law—a lawyer, a prosecutor, a judge, a professor—posts something on social media, the student watches it, follows it, likes it, and if it's good content, I notice that.

Similarly, Professor 5 (2024) observed that students use different platforms to understand a topic that was unclear in class:

> [...] now they (students) can access it (the content) on any social network. If I didn't understand it on YouTube, I'll understand it on TikTok; if I didn't understand it on TikTok, I'll go to Wikipedia; if I didn't understand it on Wikipedia, I'll go somewhere else, and then they get it.

This supports the findings of Maria and Porto (2023) that students frequently use this app. As we know, TikTok is characterized by short videos, which can lead to superficial coverage of topics. On the other hand, when a professor says a student

accesses content, we can question its quality, which is why teacher mediation is essential to avoid compromising academic development.

In the learning context, Vygotsky (2009) argues that learning occurs as an individual process mediated by interaction with others and the environment. Learning is therefore an essential condition for human development, culturally organized. Interactions between professor and student, as well as among students themselves, are fundamental to educational processes, even when mediated by digital technologies.

However, professors must encourage critical analysis of available online content, helping students filter what they access. According to Santos (2022, p. 9), one of the teacher's roles is "[…] to avoid the harmful effects of algorithms and restrict social media to pedagogical use that benefits learning, which is essential for students."

Likewise, students must be mindful of what they access and post. For professors, this care must be even greater, as it can affect their relationship with students and how they are perceived, as Student 107 (2024) noted:

> *[...] if the professor posts something that I think is (unqualified), there have been times when I thought, 'I can't believe you did that.' You know, I feel embarrassed because you're my professor, and that will be associated with my image. Whether positive or negative, you're linked to an institution, you attend that institution, so your image is directly linked to mine.*

What is posted on social media, whether by ordinary people or influencers with millions of followers, is subject to interpretation. The "what" and "how" require care, as the content creator's image is at stake. For professors, this is an ongoing concern because their image is linked to teaching as social practice carrying the responsibility to educate and respect others.

Here, we see other knowledge and skills increasingly demanded of professors, raising the question of how much educational institutions are concerned with ongoing teacher training. As Franco (2016) states, educational practice is made effective through the professor's intentionality in proposing pedagogical activities, based on specific, curricular, educational, pedagogical, and, in our view, digital knowledge.

5 Final Considerations

In education, the integration of digital technologies has become a necessity considering social demands. Aiming to analyze and discuss how the academic

community—professors and students—in a Law program perceive the impact of social networks on the educational process, this article presents two categories that emerged from the data collected.

The presence of professors and students on social networks indicates that the research participants use various social media applications. The main purposes for both groups are personal relationships, entertainment, and information. Although most professors do not produce content related to the field of Law, many students follow them and report that professors' social media content, even if personal in nature, influences their perception of the professors' professional image. These findings prompt us to reflect on the need to be mindful of what is posted.

We highlight that there is a certain pressure for professors to maintain a social media presence. Some institutions require professors to publish content on social networks as a form of institutional marketing, which represents yet another work demand. However, we stress that many higher education institutions already ensure, through policy, ways to guide and safeguard professors' rights and duties, as well as the intellectual property of course-related content.

On the other hand, we cannot overlook the fact that participating in these online social spaces can provide opportunities to share experiences and knowledge with colleagues and students beyond in-person interactions. If we aim to use social networks as a pedagogical resource, we must understand their implications and challenges.

It became clear that students seek content from professors' and/or Law professionals' profiles that cover topics discussed in class, in order to review or deepen certain aspects. Professors are aware that students turn to social networks to learn specific content, although they do not make it clear whether they recommend or use them in the classroom. There is recognition, by both professors and students, of their potential in the learning process. We believe it is necessary to provide training so that professors have the knowledge to decide when and whether to integrate them into their classes.

Furthermore, the research findings prompted us to reflect on issues of privacy and data security in shared information. We believe it is necessary to have institutional policies or guidelines for the use of social networks, to ensure respect for the employment conditions and boundaries of professors, and to prevent risks for students.

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We found that professors' presence—or absence—on social networks influence students' perception of the quality of their classes, which may lead to judgments different from what the professor intended when publishing certain content. The generational gap between professors and students became evident, particularly in how each perceives and interacts with digital platforms. While many students naturally use social networks for communication, entertainment, and learning, professors—especially those from earlier generations—may show greater resistance or discomfort in integrating these platforms into the educational process.

Social networks are part of everyone's daily life and therefore must be considered in educational practices, both to promote learning and to encourage students to critically reflect on their role in each person's life. Discussing how they affect human subjectivity is one dimension that should be addressed in undergraduate training. Therefore, the use - or rejection - of such technologies must be carefully evaluated, considering the intended educational objectives.

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