

Social Media Burnout scale: factor structure confirmation in the brazilian context

Social Media Burnout scale: confirmación de su estructura factorial en el contexto brasileño



**RESEARCH
REPORT**
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Received: 14-02-23
Accepted: 28-08-24
Published: 01-09-24

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Abstract

Objective: The aim of this study was to confirm the structure of the Social Media Burnout Scale (SMBS) in the Brazilian context.

Method: This is a psychometric study of a quantitative approach. Participants were 419 individuals from the general population, mostly college students, aged between 18 and 57 years ($M=24,77$; $SD=6,75$). Participants also answered a sociodemographic questionnaire, the Social Media Burnout Scale, and the Burnout Syndrome Assessment Scale in University Students (BSAS-us). Data were analyzed using the software JASP.

Results: The results showed that the three-factor model of the SMBS had satisfactory fit indices in the Brazilian sample ($\chi^2=77,75$, $df=32$, $CFI=0,97$, $TLI=0,97$, $RMSEA=0,05$, $95\%CI=0,04-0,07$, $SRMR=0,06$). In addition, the three factors presented acceptable McDonald's Omegas. Finally, the factor Exhaustion from the SMBS and Physical and the factor Emotional Exhaustion from the BSAS-us were correlated with $r=0,32$ ($p<0,001$), demonstrating convergent validity.

Discussion: The measure with the Portuguese name Escala de Burnout de Redes Sociais (EBRS) is the first valid and reliable measure to study the phenomenon in the Brazilian context.

Keywords: social networks; internet; burnout; self-assessment scale; validation; psychometry

Resumen

Objetivo: Este estudio tuvo como objetivo confirmar la estructura de la Social Media Burnout Scale (SMBS) en el contexto brasileño.

Método: Se trata de un estudio psicométrico de enfoque cuantitativo, donde participaron 419 individuos de la población general, en su mayoría estudiantes universitarios, con edades comprendidas entre 18 y 57 años ($M=24,77$; $DE=6,75$). Los participantes completaron un cuestionario sociodemográfico, la Social Media Burnout Scale y la Escala de Evaluación del Síndrome de Burnout en Estudiantes Universitarios (EESB-eu).

Resultados: Los datos se analizaron utilizando el software JASP. Los resultados mostraron que el modelo de tres factores de la SMBS presentó índices de ajuste satisfactorios en la muestra brasileña ($\chi^2=77,75$; $gl=32$; $CFI=0,97$; $TLI=0,97$; $RMSEA=0,05$, $95\%IC=0,04-0,07$; $SRMR=0,06$). Además, los tres factores presentaron omegas de McDonald's aceptables. Finalmente, los factores Extenuación de la SMBS y Agotamiento Físico y Emocional de la EESB-eu se correlacionaron al nivel de $r=0,32$ ($p<0,001$), evidenciando validez convergente.

Conclusión: La medida denominada en portugués Escala de Burnout de Redes Sociais (EBRS) es la primera válida y confiable para investigar este fenómeno en el contexto brasileño.

Palabras clave: redes sociales; internet; burnout; escala de autoevaluación; validación; psicometría

How to cite this article (APA):

De Oliveira Santos, L. C.O., Lopes Loureto, G. D. L., & Silva Santos, I. L. (2024). Social Media Burnout scale: factor structure confirmation in the brazilian context. *Psicogente* 27(52), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.17081/psico.27.52.6392>

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's society, social networks are part of everyday life for many portion of the world's population. As of April 2022, more than 60 % of this population reported being Internet users, and among them, 4,65 billion individuals used social networks ([Statista Research Department, 2022a](#)). In Brazil, these results are similar: the country has the fifth-largest digital population in the world, with the social networks WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok being the most popular among users ([Statista Research Department, 2022b; 2022c](#)).

This popularity does not mean that social networks only bring benefits, as they can become an invasive experience where continuous exposure to an excessive number of posts and interactions can lead to irritation and exhaustion ([Shi et al., 2020](#); [Syvertsen, 2020](#)). One of the consequences of problematic social media use is social media burnout. Burnout is a state of physical and emotional exhaustion in response to persistent stressors ([Maslach & Leiter, 2008](#)), while social media burnout is defined as the level of exhaustion that results from the use of these tools ([Han, 2018](#)). Notably, there are also different names for this phenomenon, such as "social media fatigue," "social media service fatigue," and, more recently, "social media burnout". Despite these differences, the underlying phenomenon is the same: the exhaustion experienced by the individual when using social networks too much ([Liu & Ma, 2018](#)).

In his first study on this topic, [Han \(2018\)](#) divided this variable into three sub-dimensions: emotional exhaustion (the belief that personal resources, such as time, are negatively affected by social media); depersonalization (emotional distance perceived by the user between him and his networks); and ambivalence (unclear feelings about the usefulness of social media). The author found that the three dimensions significantly reduced the likelihood that the subject would continue using social media, in this case, Facebook ([Han, 2018](#)).

At this point, it is worth asking: what leads to social media burnout? The Limited Capacity Model ([Lang, 2000](#)) provides a relevant theoretical foundation. This model assumes that humans are limited processors of quantity and quality of information that can be processed in a given period of time ([Fisher & Weber, 2020](#)). Particularly in social networks, the amount of information to which

users are exposed may exceed their cognitive resources, leading to psychological distress (Bright *et al.*, 2015).

A systematic review (Zheng & Ling, 2021) confirms these theoretical postulates and observes three levels of burnout drivers in social media: the personal level (psychological stressors, personal characteristics, and behavioral aspects); relational drivers (such as cyberbullying and the tendency to social comparison); and environmental factors (characteristics of these platforms and the messages disseminated on them, especially the excess of information available at any time). Given the complexity and negative consequences associated with social media burnout, instruments have been developed to measure this phenomenon effectively.

For example, Bright *et al.* (2015) presented a brief, single-factor measure of social media fatigue (e.g., “I am frequently overwhelmed by the amount of information available on social media sites”) that, despite a significant reliability value ($\alpha=0,91$), did not provide detailed information about its validity for subsequent use. More recently, Zhang *et al.* (2021) developed the Social Media Fatigue Scale for Chinese context, a measure consisting of 15 items (e.g., “I feel angry when I realize that social media has taken up too much of my time”) and three factors (cognitive, emotional, and behavioral experiences). The scale showed factor loadings that varied from 0,43 to 0,73 and reliability indices above 0,80 in all factors.

Also in the Chinese context, Ma and Liu (2021) developed the Social Media Burnout Scale (SMBS), an extension of Han’s (2018) measurement that previously focused exclusively on Facebook. The SMBS consists of 10 items divided into three factors (Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Ambivalence). Factor loadings above 0,68 and satisfactory reliability indices were observed for all dimensions (Ambivalence $\alpha=0,90$, Exhaustion $\alpha=0,81$, and Depersonalization $\alpha=0,79$).

Research using SMBS has shown significant results on this topic. For example, Harren *et al.* (2021) observed that younger people who use social media more for work, have higher levels of perfectionism, and are more likely to believe in their own impulse control are more likely to develop burnout. Liu and Ma (2018) added excessive use of social networks and anxiety related to these platforms as additional risk factors.

Despite these findings contributing to the understanding of the phenomenon, social media burnout as a variable dependent on other aspects of Internet/ social media use is still relatively understudied (Harren *et al.*, 2021). Specifically, in the Brazilian context, neither studies on this topic nor validated instruments to measure this construct have been observed, which justifies the present study, whose objective is to provide psychometric evidence of the validity and reliability of a Brazilian version of the Social Media Burnout Scale, in order to enable the conduct of studies on this topic in this country.

2. METHOD

2.1. Design

This is a quantitative and psychometric study.

2.2. Measures

In addition to a sociodemographic questionnaire with items to characterize the sample (e.g., age, gender, and marital status), participants responded to the measures described below.

Burnout Syndrome Assessment Scale in University Students (BSAS-us):

Developed by Carlotto and Câmara (2020), this is a measure to assess burnout in university students. The instrument consists of 14 items distributed across the factors Physical and Emotional Exhaustion, Disengagement, and Educational Ineffectiveness. The items are answered on a five-point scale ranging from 0 (never) to 4 (every day) in relation to the frequency with which the respondent experiences each described situation. This instrument was used in the study to test the convergent validity of the Brazilian version of the SMBS.

Version of the Social Media Burnout Scale (SMBS) translated into Portuguese/Escala de Burnout de Redes Sociais (EBRS):

The SMBS was originally developed by Han (2018) in the US context to measure burnout related to Facebook use. In the present study, the Chinese version of the instrument was used as a reference, validated and adapted by Ma and Liu (2021) to measure the phenomenon in the context of social media in general. This instrument consists of 10 items divided into three factors: Ambivalence, Exhaustion, and Depersonalization. The items are answered on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Three bilingual psychologists were involved in the translation of the SMBS items, using the procedure known as back-translation. The first bilingual psychologist performed the translation from English to Portuguese. In a second moment, another psychologist translated the Portuguese version back into English. Finally, a third professional compared the two English versions and was able to establish equivalence between the two. Thus, the items translated into Portuguese did not need to be corrected or adjusted. Subsequently, the initial version of the instrument in Portuguese was subjected to the semantic validation process, in which, 15 university students participated for convenience, who were asked to indicate any difficulties in understanding the items. Since no misunderstandings were reported, the final version of the instrument used in this study was obtained, named Escala de Burnout de Redes Sociais (EBRS), which can be found in the supplementary material.

2.3. Participants

The study included 419 individuals from the general population, mostly college students, aged 18 to 57 years ($M=24,77$, $SD=6,75$), predominantly female (67,1 %), heterosexual (83,8 %), single (80,7 %), Catholic (50,4 %), and middle class (76,8 %).

2.4. Procedure

Data were collected remotely in a virtual environment. The questionnaire with instruments was formulated on the Google Forms platform and was available between July and September 2022. The link was shared through the authors' social channels (e.g., Instagram, WhatsApp). On average, participants took 10 minutes to complete the survey. This study was approved by the ethics committee of the Centro Universitário de Patos (UNIFIP), and followed national standards regarding research with human beings, Brazilian Resolution 510/16, [Conselho Nacional de Saúde \[CNS\] \(2016\)](#), which requires free and informed consent from participants and ensures anonymity, confidentiality, and the possibility of withdrawal at any time without consequences.

2.5. Data analysis

Data were analyzed using JASP software. Given the consolidation of the burnout structure in the literature, as well as the factor structure already known in the U.S.A. and Chinese scenarios of the instrument to be validated, it was decided to conduct a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to confirm this structure of the measure and test its invariance with respect to the

gender of the respondents. For this analysis, the Robust Diagonally Weighted Least Squares (RDWLS) estimation method was used, which is more suitable for categorical data (Distefano & Morgan, 2014; Li, 2016). The following fit indices were used as criteria for model evaluation: Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). A good fit is achieved when the values of CFI and TLI are $>0,90$ and preferably $>0,95$, while good RMSEA and SRMR values are those $<0,08$ or preferably $<0,06$, where the upper limit of the confidence interval $<0,10$ (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Brown, 2015).

With respect to invariance of the measure, the configural, metric, and scalar models were evaluated. The configural model assessed whether the number of factors and items per factor were acceptable for both groups (men and women). If the model is not supported, the factorial structure of the instrument cannot be considered equivalent for both groups. Metric invariance analyzed whether the item factor loadings could be considered equivalent between groups. Scalar invariance examined whether the level of the latent trait required to endorse the item categories (thresholds) was the same between groups (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002). The measure invariance is accepted when there are significant reductions in CFI ($\Delta CFI < 0,01$) and $\Delta RMSEA < 0,15$ in the metric and scalar invariance models to the detriment of the configural model (Chen, 2007; Hair *et al.*, 2014).

McDonald's Omega was used, which is a better estimator compared to Cronbach's Alpha (Ravinder & Saraswathi, 2020). Finally, Pearson's correlation analyzes were performed to test convergent validity between the factors and the total scores of the SMBS and the BSAS-us. The criterion proposed by Cohen (1988) was used to interpret the values, where values from 0,50 to 1,00 indicate strong relationships, from 0,30 to 0,49 moderate relationships, and from 0,10 to 0,29 weak relationships. Positive and moderate correlations are expected between the factors of the measures.

3. RESULTS

The CFA confirmed the three-factor model of the EBRS, finding satisfactory fit indices ($\chi^2 = 77,75$; $df = 32$, CFI = 0,97, TLI = 0,97, RMSEA = 0,05, 95 % CI = 0,04-0,07, SRMR = 0,06). Item factor loadings varied from 0,24 (item 6) to 0,90 (item 4), all of which were statistically different from zero ($p < 0,001$). The model is shown in Figure 1.

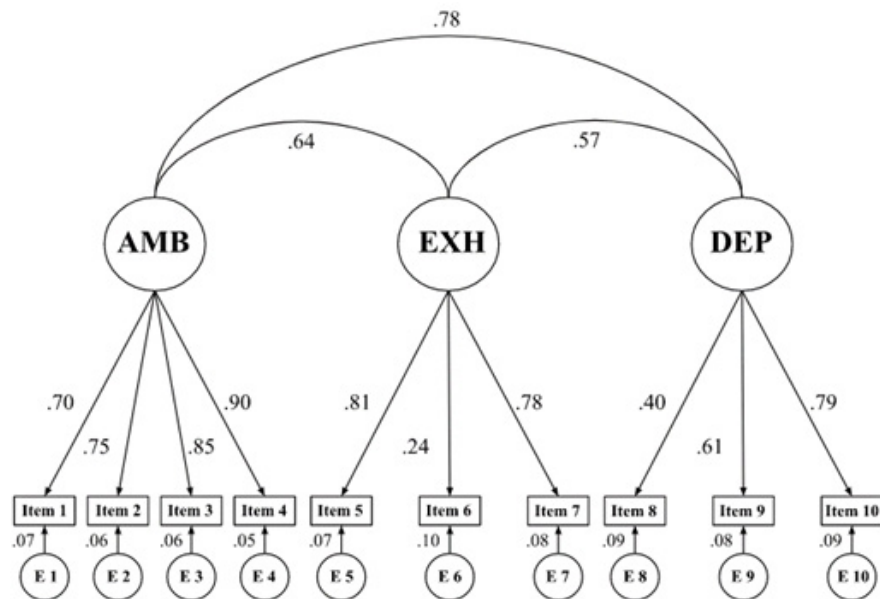


Figure 1. Standardized coefficient model of CFA

Note: AMB = Ambivalence, EXH = Exhaustion, DEP = Depersonalization.

Regarding the reliability of the measure, the following McDonald's Omegas (ω) were observed for its factors: Ambivalence ($\omega = 0,87$), Exhaustion ($\omega = 0,67$), and Depersonalization ($\omega = 0,66$). However, the SMBS/EBRS total score had an Omega of 0,85. Then, the invariance of the measurement with respect to the gender of the participants was observed. It was found that the model was invariant at all levels of analysis (configural, metric, and scalar), as shown in Table 1.

Table 1.

Measurement Invariance in Relation to Gender

MEASURE INVARIANCE			FIT INDICES			
SMBS/EBRS	RMSEA (90 % CI)	Δ RMSEA	SRMR	TLI	CFI	Δ CFI
Configural invariance	0,053					
(0,032-0,072)	-	0,076	0,975	0,982	-	
Metric invariance	0,053					
(0,033-0,071)	0,000	0,080	0,975	0,980	0,002	
Scalar invariance	0,059					
(0,042-0,075)	0,006	0,079	0,969	0,973	0,009	

Finally, we looked for evidence of convergent validity of the SMBS/EBRS with the Burnout Syndrome Assessment Scale in University Students (BSAS-us). Results showed positive and statistically significant correlations between all SMBS/EBRS and BSAS-us factors, except for the Depersonalization factor with

the Physical and Emotional Exhaustion factor ($r = 0,06$, $p = 0,17$). However, only the relationship between Exhaustion and Physical and Emotional Exhaustion had a magnitude greater than 0,30 ($r = 0,32$; $p < 0,001$). Correlative results are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2.

Correlation Matrix

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	-							
2	0,52**	-						
3	0,59**	0,30**	-					
4	0,14*	0,13*	0,13*	-				
5	0,18*	0,32**	0,06	0,36**	-			
6	0,16**	0,13*	0,13*	0,71**	0,33**	-		
7	0,91**	0,71**	0,77**	0,16**	0,22**	0,17**	-	
8	0,21**	0,25**	0,13*	0,83**	0,76**	0,80**	0,24**	-

Note. 1 = Ambivalence, 2 = Exhaustion, 3 = Depersonalization, 4 = Disengagement, 5 = Physical and Emotional Exhaustion, 6 = Educational Ineffectiveness, 7 = SMBS/EBRS total score, 8 = BSAS-us total score.

* $p < 0,05$, ** $p < 0,001$.

4. DISCUSSION

The present study aimed was to gather initial psychometric evidence of the validity and reliability of the Social Media Burnout Scale (SMBS; Ma & Liu, 2021) for the Brazilian context. To this end, the instrument underwent translation and re-translation by qualified professionals in the field, as well as semantic validation based on a previous application with a group of university students who reported that there were no confounding factors in the writing of the items.

It should be noted that on this occasion it was of interest to test the already classic factorial structure of the burnout phenomenon. Several studies have pointed to measurement instruments in which burnout is structured in three dimensions, such as the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach *et al.*, 1996), the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (Kristensen *et al.*, 2005), the Psychic Effects of Burnout Scale (Izquierdo & Velandrino, 1992), the Burnout Syndrome Assessment Scale in University Students (Carlotto & Câmara, 2020), and the Social Media Burnout Scale itself in the American (Han, 2018) and Chinese (Ma & Liu, 2021) contexts. Therefore, in the present study, we resorted to a confirmatory factorial approach of the three-factor structure of the SMBS, indicated by the authors of the Chinese version of the instrument, which includes social media in general, in addition to Facebook, as the model

with the best-fit indices to the detriment of models with one or two factors (Ma & Liu, 2021).

The results obtained from the Brazilian sample showed satisfactory fit indices according to the literature (Brown, 2015) and slightly better than those of the three-factor model without corrections in the study by Ma and Liu (2021). More specifically, CFI and TLI of 0,95 and 0,94 were obtained in the original study versus 0,97 for both indicators in the present study, and RMSEA of 0,08 in the original study and 0,05 in the present analysis.

As for evidence of reliability, Ma and Liu (2021) used Cronbach's Alpha to assess the internal consistency of the factors, finding values ranging from 0,79 (Depersonalization) to 0,90 (Ambivalence). In our study, we chose McDonald's Omega and observed values of 0,66 (Depersonalization), 0,67 (Exhaustion), and 0,87 (Ambivalence). Although the reliability values for the first two factors are slightly lower than those observed in the original study, they are considered marginal reliability, and above the recommended threshold (0,60) in the literature for instruments used for research purposes (Hair *et al.*, 2014). It is important to note that the authors of the original instrument had a sample of 1042 university students, while the present study included 419 people from the general population and college students, which is 40,2 % of the number of the first sample, as well as that the reliability of a test tends to be greater the larger the sample size (Pasquali, 2009) and that McDonald's Omega is a more stable index even for smaller samples (Ercan *et al.*, 2007).

To complement, we wanted to check whether the factorial model of the measure is invariant between males and females, a procedure that was not performed in the reference study. The results indicated that the structure of the Brazilian version of the SMBS remains the same between the aforementioned groups at all levels of analysis (configural, metric, and scalar) according to the criteria in the literature (Chen, 2007; Hair *et al.*, 2014). In addition, we also wanted to demonstrate the convergent validity of the measure, which was mentioned by Ma and Liu (2021) as a possibility for future research, as they did not use similar measures in their study. For this purpose, we used the Burnout Syndrome Assessment Scale in University Students (BSAS-us, Carlotto & Câmara, 2020) and found satisfactory convergence ($r=0,32$; $p<0,001$) between the Exhaustion and Physical and Emotional Exhaustion factors.

Although the results of the convergent validity analysis are not as meaningful as expected, it is important to keep in mind that the factors of Exhaustion and Physical and Emotional Exhaustion represent the central core of Burnout, the main complaint of individuals affected by this syndrome and its most obvious manifestation (Leiter *et al.*, 2015). In addition, classical authors of the phenomenon define burnout as “an erosion of values, dignity, spirit and will - an erosion of the human soul” (Maslach & Leiter, 1997, p.17). Finally, it is important to emphasise that although the two measures include burnout, they do so in different contexts. While the SMBS/EBRS examines the phenomenon at the core of social media use, the BSAS-us does so in relation to academic activities. Even if we had included the most popular instrument for assessing burnout, the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach *et al.*, 1996), the same thing would happen because this instrument assesses the phenomenon in the context of work activities.

5. LIMITATIONS

In addition to the contributions of this study, some limitations must also be mentioned. The first concerns the low diversity of the sample, which, although composed of the general population, is a predominantly young group of college students, considering the observed mean age (24,77) and standard deviation (6,75), which leads us to believe that the sample is not very diverse. It should be noted, however, that the purpose of the present study is not to make generalizations from the sample to population, but to gather psychometric evidence for the measure in question. Another limitation concerns the lack of similar alternative instruments assessing the same construct in the same context to allow for a more accurate test of convergent validity. A third limitation concerns the fact that we did not perform an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), since we tested a three-factor structure of burnout that is classic in the literature (Han's, 2018; Ma & Liu, 2021; Maslach & Leiter, 2008). However, future studies may seek to perform such an exploratory procedure.

Future scientific efforts, in addition to overcoming the above limitations, could include the assessment of discriminant validity, as well as the analysis of SMBS/EBRS items in light of Item Response Theory (IRT, Pasquali, 2020), in procedures such as differential item functioning and item difficulty.

6. CONCLUSION

Given the empirical and psychometric evidence collected and previously discussed, we are confident that the present study successfully achieved its goal. We provide a valid, accurate, and parsimonious measure for the Brazilian

context that has the potential to contribute to scientific investigations aimed at assessing a phenomenon that is increasingly experienced by subjects in the modern, technological, and connected society and that may be related to different variables such as Internet and smartphone addiction, personality traits, self-concept, mental health, parenting styles, need for cognition, and others.

7. HIGHLIGHTS

This study verifies the psychometric properties of the Social Media Burnout Scale in Brazil. Evidence is provided that the scale is suitable for research on a current topic in this context, until then there were no measurement tools for this purpose.

Acknowledgment: We thank the study participants.

Funding: This research did not receive any specific grants from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or nonprofit sectors.

Interest conflict: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Disclaimer and authors' contributor roles: The opinions expressed in the article are those of the authors. **Layrthton Carlos de Oliveira Santos:** Conceptualization, Investigation, Data curation, Formal Analysis, Writing - review & editing. **Gleidson Diego Lopes Loureto:** Investigation, Formal Analysis, Writing - original draft. **Isabella Leandra Silva Santos:** Investigation, Writing - original draft.

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