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"POR QUE EU TENHO QUE DEFENDER ESSE TAL DE TCC? ELE NÃO PODE SE DEFENDER SOZINHO?" UMA ANÁLISE DE COMENTÁRIOS DE ESTUDANTES SOBRE O PROCESSO DE ESCRITA EM UMA REDE SOCIAL

"WHY DO I HAVE TO DEFEND THIS SO-CALLED THESIS? CAN'T IT DEFEND ITSELF?": AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' COMMENTS ON THE WRITING PROCESS ON A SOCIAL NETWORK

"¿POR QUÉ TENGO QUE DEFENDER ESTE TAL TCC? ¿NO PUEDE DEFENDERSE SOLO?": UN ANÁLISIS DE COMENTARIOS DE ESTUDIANTES SOBRE EL PROCESO DE ESCRITURA EN UNA RED SOCIAL

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Resumo

O processo de produção do Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso (TCC) tem sido frequentemente associado a níveis elevados de estresse, ansiedade e sofrimento psíquico entre estudantes universitários. Nesse contexto, a presente pesquisa teve como objetivo identificar os fatores relacionados ao adoecimento mental de estudantes durante a elaboração do TCC, bem como analisar como essas experiências são expressas em uma rede social. Trata-se de um estudo de abordagem qualitativa, com delineamento netnográfico, realizado a partir da coleta de comentários (tweets) publicados na plataforma Twitter. Inicialmente, foi realizado um levantamento bibliográfico em bases de dados científicas, seguido da coleta de 69 tweets por meio de palavras-chave relacionadas ao tema, dos quais 28 foram selecionados para análise. Os dados foram examinados com base na técnica de Análise de Conteúdo, segundo Bardin, permitindo a organização em três categorias temáticas: relações interpessoais no ambiente acadêmico, fatores externos à vida universitária e aspectos relacionados ao processo de escrita, como fluidez e procrastinação. Os resultados evidenciam que o adoecimento psíquico dos estudantes está associado não apenas às exigências acadêmicas do TCC, mas também a fatores externos, como condições socioeconômicas, relações familiares e sobrecarga de atividades. Além disso, observou-se que relações positivas com orientadores e afinidade com o tema contribuem para uma experiência menos adoecedora. Conclui-se que o processo de escrita do TCC, embora desafiador, pode ser potencialmente menos prejudicial à saúde mental quando há suporte institucional, relações acadêmicas saudáveis e melhores condições de enfrentamento por parte dos estudantes. Destaca-se a necessidade de ampliação de estudos sobre a temática e de estratégias voltadas à promoção da saúde mental no contexto universitário.

Palavras-chave: Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso; Saúde mental; Estudantes universitários; Netnografia.

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Abstract

The process of writing the Undergraduate Thesis (Final Course Project) has often been associated with high levels of stress, anxiety, and psychological distress among university students. In this context, this study aimed to identify the factors related to students' mental distress during the development of their thesis, as well as to analyze how these experiences are expressed on a social network. This is a qualitative study with a netnographic approach, based on the collection of comments (tweets) published on Twitter. Initially, a bibliographic review was conducted in scientific databases, followed by the collection of 69 tweets using keywords related to the topic, of which 28 were selected for analysis. The data were examined using Content Analysis, according to Bardin, allowing the organization into three thematic categories: interpersonal relationships in the academic environment, external factors to university life, and aspects related to the writing process, such as fluency and procrastination. The results indicate that students' psychological distress is associated not only with the academic demands of the thesis but also with external factors, such as socioeconomic conditions, family relationships, and workload. Furthermore, positive relationships with advisors and affinity with the chosen topic contribute to a less distressing experience. It is concluded that the thesis writing process, although challenging, can be less harmful to mental health when there is institutional support, healthy academic relationships, and better coping conditions among students. The study highlights the need for further research and strategies aimed at promoting mental health in the university context.

Keywords: Undergraduate thesis; Mental health; University students; Netnography.

Resumen

El proceso de elaboración del Trabajo de Fin de Grado (TCC) ha sido frecuentemente asociado con altos niveles de estrés, ansiedad y sufrimiento psíquico entre estudiantes universitarios. En este contexto, el presente estudio tuvo como objetivo identificar los factores relacionados con el deterioro de la salud mental de los estudiantes durante la elaboración del TCC, así como analizar cómo estas experiencias se expresan en una red social. Se trata de una investigación de enfoque cualitativo, con diseño netnográfico, realizada a partir de la recolección de comentarios (tweets) publicados en la plataforma Twitter. Inicialmente, se llevó a cabo una revisión bibliográfica en bases de datos científicas, seguida de la recopilación de 69 tweets mediante palabras clave relacionadas con el tema, de los cuales 28 fueron seleccionados para el análisis. Los datos fueron examinados mediante la técnica de Análisis de Contenido, según Bardin, lo que permitió su organización en tres categorías temáticas: relaciones interpersonales en el entorno académico, factores externos a la vida universitaria y aspectos relacionados con el proceso de escritura, como la fluidez y la procrastinación. Los resultados evidencian que el malestar psíquico de los estudiantes está asociado no solo a las exigencias académicas del TCC, sino también a factores externos, como condiciones socioeconómicas, relaciones familiares y sobrecarga de actividades. Además, se

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observó que las relaciones positivas con los orientadores y la afinidad con el tema contribuyen a una experiencia menos perjudicial. Se concluye que el proceso de escritura del TCC, aunque desafiante, puede ser menos perjudicial para la salud mental cuando existe apoyo institucional, relaciones académicas saludables y mejores condiciones de afrontamiento por parte de los estudiantes. Se destaca la necesidad de ampliar estudios sobre el tema y de implementar estrategias orientadas a la promoción de la salud mental en el contexto universitario.

Palabras clave: Trabajo de Fin de Grado; Salud mental; Estudiantes universitarios; Netnografía.

1. Introduction

Entering the academic environment, university students are often confronted with significant changes that directly affect their personal lives, both positively and negatively, particularly regarding their cognitive abilities to cope with academic demands, their perception, and their development of social skills in task performance.

Throughout their academic journey, students face various demands, such as many exams, assignments, and presentations, culminating in the final stages of their degree with the requirement to complete a final project: the Undergraduate Thesis (Final Course Project - TCC).

TCC is an academic requirement typically undertaken during the final semesters of a degree program. Its subject matter is generally scientific in nature and directly related to the student's field of study. The process is divided into stages, including the written component and the oral defense before an examining committee.

Within academic life, it is common to hear students express fear regarding the completion of the TCC, often perceived as the most difficult task of their undergraduate studies, reinforced by a shared social perception. As this requirement usually takes place in the final year, students frequently report increased levels of stress, influenced by mandatory internships with heavy workloads, anxiety related to entering the job market or pursuing further education (such as graduate studies), and external factors such as family and socioeconomic issues (FERREIRA, 2020).

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According to Peixoto (2019), when students associate stressors and strict academic demands with potential negative impacts on their performance, there is an increased likelihood of psychological distress, particularly when avoidance behaviors emerge. This occurs because the brain processes stress by releasing substances that keep the individual in a heightened state of alertness, impairing reasoning, environmental comprehension, and decision-making abilities.

These changes create a new context in students' lives and may trigger negative behaviors affecting their well-being, depending on how everyone is positioned within this environment. Such conditions may lead to Common Mental Disorders, characterized by mixed emotional states involving anxiety and depression, sleep disturbances, lack of concentration, irritability, decreased academic performance, and even uncontrolled use of medication (ROZEIRA et al., 2018).

Using psychoactive substances to manage academic stress is becoming more prevalent. According to Rozeira et al. (2018), high levels of suicide risk, fear of academic failure, and other psychological stressors contribute to increased medication use without prescription, often justified by a socially constructed belief that such use is rational. This represents an important issue, as such practices are linked to unhealthy psychological processes.

Higher education itself also plays a role in students' psychological distress. According to Rozeira et al. (2018), Brazil ranks second among 180 countries in the number of students experiencing anxiety related to exams and assignments. Many of these students present symptoms such as sleep disturbances, eating disorders, and agitation, influenced by a competitive and individualistic educational model shaped by labor market demands and social expectations.

The negative impact of academic demands may weaken both academic performance and students' social interactions. Fonseca (2019, p. 2) highlights that emotional exhaustion caused by stress during academic training may lead to more severe conditions, such as burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion resulting from academic demands and associated learning impairments.

Within this framework, the interactionist theory of stress becomes relevant,

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as it understands stress as the result of the interaction between the individual and their environment, as well as the interpretation, positive or negative, assigned to specific events. The perception of stressors may trigger physiological and emotional responses.

Furthermore, Cardozo et al. (2016) emphasizes the relationship between anxiety disorders and the TCC among biomedical students, demonstrating how anxiety can interfere with the learning process and highlighting the importance of implementing measures to promote students' mental health within academic settings.

Their findings indicate that approximately 50% of students reported feelings of anxiety and fear when presenting their TCC and difficulties during data collection. However, anxiety is not limited to the TCC itself but is influenced by multiple factors, including reduced leisure time, limited interaction with family and friends, financial issues, family health problems, and environmental conditions such as housing and commuting distance. These factors may contribute to the development of anxiety patterns and even lead to maladaptive coping strategies, such as alcohol abuse.

Overall, it can be observed that a shared emotional experience emerges among students during the TCC process, often associated with the belief that this requirement is inherently distressing. This perception may influence individual behavior within a collective context.

As this is not an isolated experience, students frequently share these perceptions on social media, using such platforms as spaces for identification and exchange of experiences, particularly in environments centered on written communication, such as Twitter, where users engage in discussions about trending topics and personal experiences.

Given the limited research addressing the relationship between undergraduate thesis work and mental health, this study is relevant as it explores the phenomenon from the perspective of students themselves, analyzing how psychological distress during undergraduate studies is expressed and shared on Twitter.

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The general objective of this study is to identify factors associated with psychological distress among university students during the development of their undergraduate thesis. The specific objectives include analyzing students' comments about the TCC writing process on Twitter and understanding how they cope with this process through social media.

Thus, the guiding research question is: how can we understand the dissemination of comments made by university students on Twitter regarding the production of the undergraduate thesis?

This study assumes that psychological distress is associated with academic pressure related to thesis writing. It is also hypothesized that external factors beyond the university environment may negatively affect students' mental health, and that inadequate supervision or negative experiences during the defense process may contribute to discouragement, leading students to express their experiences on social media.

2. Methodology

This study initially involved a bibliographic review conducted through the SciELO and CAPES Portal databases, using descriptors such as "psychological stress," "student health," and "academic psychological distress." This stage aimed to provide a theoretical foundation for research and to situate the study within existing academic discussions. According to Souza (2010), bibliographic review constitutes a fundamental step in understanding a research problem, as it allows for the identification of convergences and divergences across previous studies.

The research adopts a qualitative approach, which, as highlighted by Nascimento (2015), seeks to interpret phenomena, meanings, and experiences from the perspective of the subjects involved. Within this framework, the present study is informed by principles of netnography, understood as an adaptation of ethnographic methods to digital environments.

However, rather than assuming a fully immersive netnographic design, the study is more accurately positioned as a netnographically informed analysis of digital discourse, focusing on publicly available content produced on Twitter. This

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distinction is relevant, as the research does not involve prolonged engagement with a specific online community, but rather the systematic examination of discursive manifestations within a defined digital context.

Twitter was selected as the research field due to its dynamic nature and its role as a platform for the expression of diverse opinions, experiences, and emotional states. The platform enables the circulation of both personal narratives and socially shared meanings, making it a relevant environment for observing how students articulate their experiences regarding academic writing and mental health. Additionally, Twitter's structural characteristics, such as brevity of posts and algorithmically driven visibility, contribute to the production of concise and often emotionally intensified discourse.

Data collection was conducted using Twitter's search tool, based on predefined keywords, namely "TCC," "mental health," and "writing process." The dataset was temporally delimited to a continuous three-day period in May 2023, ensuring consistency in the captured discursive patterns. Initially, 69 tweets were retrieved.

From this corpus, 28 tweets were selected for in-depth analysis based on clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Inclusion criteria comprised tweets that explicitly referenced the TCC or academic writing process, presented expressions of emotional experiences such as stress, anxiety, frustration, or avoidance, and demonstrated relevance to the research objective.

Exclusion criteria included repetitive content that did not contribute new analytical elements, tweets lacking contextual clarity, and posts unrelated to academic experience. The final sample size was defined according to the principle of thematic saturation, understood as the point at which no substantially new meanings emerged from the data.

It is important to acknowledge that data derived from social media platforms are subject to inherent methodological limitations. Twitter content reflects processes of self-selection, as users who publicly express their experiences do not represent the totality of the student population.

Furthermore, digital discourse is often performative, characterized by

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exaggeration, irony, and strategic self-presentation. Algorithmic dynamics also influence the visibility of content, privileging posts with higher engagement. For these reasons, the tweets analyzed in this study are not interpreted as direct representations of psychological states, but rather as discursive constructions shaped by social, cultural, and technological mediations.

From an epistemological perspective, this study assumes that digital language should not be understood as a transparent reflection of subjective reality. Instead, expressions published on platforms such as Twitter are embedded in performative and relational contexts, in which users construct meanings, negotiate identities, and communicate experiences to an imagined audience. Therefore, the analysis focuses on how academic suffering is narrated and shared, rather than on verifying the authenticity of individual experiences.

The analytical procedure was based on Content Analysis, following the framework proposed by Bardin (1977). According to Moraes (1999), this method allows for a systematic interpretation of textual data, enabling a deeper understanding of meanings beyond surface-level reading.

The analysis involved pre-analysis, coding, categorization, and interpretation. Initially, a floating reading of the material was conducted to facilitate familiarization with the dataset and to identify preliminary analytical directions. Subsequently, the tweets were coded and organized into thematic units, allowing for the identification of recurring patterns and meanings.

The categorization process followed principles of mutual exclusivity, homogeneity, and theoretical relevance, ensuring analytical coherence. Three thematic categories were constructed inductively based on recurring patterns observed in the data: interpersonal relationships in the academic environment, external factors influencing academic experience, and aspects related to the writing process, particularly fluency and procrastination. These categories were not predefined, but emerged from the interpretative engagement with the data, in dialogue with the theoretical framework of the study.

The inferential stage of the analysis involved integrating these categories to understand how different dimensions, academic, personal, and behavioral, interact

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in shaping students' experiences with the TCC writing process. This stage also considered elements of communication, such as the sender (users), the message (tweets), the receiver (audience), and the medium (Twitter), allowing for a more comprehensive interpretation of the data within its communicative context.

Finally, ethical considerations were addressed in accordance with guidelines for digital research, such as those proposed by the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR). Although the data analyzed were publicly available, measures were taken to preserve user anonymity and to handle sensitive content responsibly, particularly given the presence of themes related to mental health and psychological distress. The study recognizes that the public nature of social media data does not eliminate ethical responsibility, especially when dealing with vulnerable topics.

3. Results and Discussion

The categorization process of this study was developed in accordance with the methodological principles of Content Analysis proposed by Bardin (1977), particularly within the thematic modality. This stage represents a central moment of the analytical procedure, as it is through categorization that the raw empirical material is reorganized, structured, and transformed into meaningful analytical units capable of supporting interpretative inferences.

Initially, the collected material, composed of tweets retrieved from Twitter, was subjected to a process of pre-analysis, characterized by a floating reading of the corpus. This stage allowed the researcher to establish an initial contact with the data, enabling the identification of recurrent themes, emotional patterns, and discursive tendencies present in the material. At this point, no rigid classification was imposed; rather, the objective was to allow the data to "speak," guiding the emergence of preliminary analytical directions.

Following this phase, the material underwent the process of coding, which corresponds to the decomposition of the corpus into units of analysis. In this study, the unit of record was defined as the thematic unit, understood as segments of discourse that express a central meaning related to the research problem. These units were not limited to isolated words but encompassed complete expressions,

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sentences, or fragments of tweets that conveyed relevant meanings about the TCC writing process and its associated emotional experiences.

Simultaneously, the unit of context was considered as the broader discursive environment in which each unit of record was embedded. This allowed for a more precise interpretation of meanings, preventing decontextualized analysis and enabling the researcher to understand not only what was being said, but also how and under which circumstances the discourse was produced.

Once the coding process was completed, the units of record were grouped based on similarity, recurrence, and analytical relevance, leading to the construction of thematic categories. This grouping was not arbitrary but guided by the methodological criteria established by Bardin (1977), ensuring rigor and consistency throughout the analytical process.

The principle of mutual exclusivity was applied to ensure that each unit of analysis was assigned to only one category, avoiding overlap and preserving clarity in the interpretation of results. The criterion of homogeneity required that all elements within a given category share a common analytical dimension, ensuring internal coherence. The principle of pertinence guaranteed that the categories were aligned with the research objectives and theoretical framework, preventing the inclusion of irrelevant or marginal elements.

Furthermore, objectivity and fidelity were maintained through the consistent application of coding procedures, ensuring that the categorization process could be replicated under similar analytical conditions. Finally, the criterion of productivity was considered, meaning that the categories needed to be capable of generating meaningful interpretations, allowing for the emergence of new insights and analytical connections.

From this process, three major thematic categories were constructed inductively, based on the recurrence of patterns observed in the data and their relevance to the research problem. These categories represent distinct yet interconnected dimensions of students' experiences with the TCC writing process.

The first category, interpersonal relationships in the academic environment, encompasses discursive units that refer to interactions between students and

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academic agents, including advisors, professors, and institutional structures. The analysis of this category revealed that these relationships function as mediating elements in students' experiences, influencing both their emotional responses and their engagement with academic tasks.

Within this category, it was possible to identify a dual dynamic: on one hand, supportive and collaborative relationships that facilitate the writing process; on the other hand, distant, hierarchical, or critical relationships that intensify feelings of insecurity and psychological distress.

The second category, external factors affecting academic experience, includes discursive units that refer to conditions outside the academic environment that impact students' ability to engage in the writing process. These factors involve socioeconomic conditions, work obligations, family responsibilities, and broader life circumstances.

The analysis of this category demonstrates that academic distress is not an isolated phenomenon, but rather the result of an interaction between institutional demands and external pressures, reinforcing the understanding of the student as a subject situated within a broader psychosocial context.

The third category, writing process: fluency and procrastination, focuses on discursive units related to students' subjective experiences with academic writing. This category captures the ambivalence present in the writing process, characterized by oscillations between avoidance behaviors and moments of productive engagement.

Procrastination emerges as a recurring pattern, often associated with emotional discomfort, fear of failure, and perceived academic pressure. At the same time, reports of fluency and satisfaction indicate that the writing process can also be experienced positively under certain conditions, particularly when there is alignment between the student's interests and the research topic, as well as the presence of adequate academic support.

The final stage of the analytical process involved inferential interpretation, in which the categories were not treated as isolated constructions, but rather as interconnected dimensions of a broader phenomenon. This stage enabled the

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identification of relationships between categories, revealing that students' experiences with the TCC are shaped by the interaction of interpersonal, contextual, and individual factors.

Thus, categorization in this study did not function merely as a classificatory procedure, but as a methodological strategy for constructing meaning, allowing the transformation of fragmented discursive material into a coherent and analytically robust understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

4. Conclusion

This study aimed to understand how university students express their experiences regarding the TCC writing process through comments posted on Twitter, as well as to identify factors associated with psychological distress during this stage of academic life.

By adopting a qualitative approach informed by netnography and grounded in content analysis, it was possible to examine how students construct, articulate, and share meanings related to academic writing within a digital environment.

The findings demonstrate that the TCC writing process is not experienced merely as an academic requirement, but as a complex psychosocial phenomenon shaped by the interaction of institutional demands, personal circumstances, and emotional processes.

Academic pressures, such as deadlines, evaluation procedures, and performance expectations, emerge as central elements of distress. However, these factors do not operate in isolation, as external conditions, including financial instability, family responsibilities, and time constraints, significantly influence students' capacity to engage with academic tasks.

In addition, the quality of interpersonal relationships within the academic environment, particularly between students and advisors, proved to be a decisive factor in shaping students' experiences. Supportive and dialogical relationships tend to function as protective elements, fostering engagement and reducing emotional burden. In contrast, distant, hierarchical, or unsupportive interactions may intensify feelings of insecurity, anxiety, and discouragement, reinforcing the

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perception of TCC as an overwhelming and isolating process.

Another important contribution of this study lies in the reinterpretation of procrastination. Rather than being understood solely as a failure of time management, procrastination emerges as an emotionally mediated response associated with fear of failure, self-doubt, and perceived academic pressure. At the same time, the presence of moments of writing fluency and engagement indicates that the writing experience is dynamic and context-dependent, influenced by motivation, self-efficacy, and the availability of academic and emotional support.

Furthermore, the study highlights the role of social media as a space for collective expression and meaning making. Twitter operates not only as a communication platform but as a sociocultural environment in which students share experiences, construct narratives about academic life, and normalize their difficulties. In this sense, the circulation of these discourses reflects broader cultural processes related to the normalization of psychological distress and the pressures embedded in contemporary academic performance.

Despite its contributions, this study presents limitations that must be acknowledged. The relatively small sample size, the reliance on publicly available data, and the absence of direct interaction with participants restrict the depth and generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the performative nature of digital discourse requires careful interpretation, as online expressions may not directly correspond to subjective experiences.

Future research should expand the analytical scope by incorporating larger datasets and complementary methodological approaches, such as interviews and focus groups, to deepen the understanding of students' experiences across different academic contexts. Such approaches may provide greater insight into the subjective dimensions that cannot be fully captured through digital discourse alone.

Finally, this study underscores the urgent need for institutional strategies aimed at promoting mental health within higher education. Universities must recognize that academic writing processes, such as the TCC, are not solely technical or cognitive tasks, but experiences deeply intertwined with emotional and

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social dimensions. Therefore, fostering supportive academic environments, strengthening advisor–student relationships, and implementing effective mental health policies are essential steps toward reducing psychological distress.

Although the TCC remains a fundamental component of academic training, it should not become a source of excessive psychological suffering. Understanding this process from the students' perspective is a crucial step toward building more humane, supportive, and responsive educational practices.

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