

The Connectiveness between Assertiveness and Dependence on Social Networks of Future Teachers

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Abstract: Assertiveness is the ability to act on the basis of one's self-esteem by considering the point of view of other people, so that the behaviour remains within positive boundaries. Given the fact that online communication is already firmly entrenched in our lives, the study aims to explore the relationship between individuals' self-assertive behaviour and addiction on the use of social networks. The authors have applied two tests developed by Sheinov: "*Addiction to social networks*" and "*Test of Assertive Behaviour*." Fifty university students agreed to participate in this study on a voluntarily bases. All of them were first-year students from Daugavpils University. It was revealed in the study that the relationship between assertive behaviour and dependence on social networking is complex and non-linear and depends on age, professional and cultural characteristics of the individual. Today, the need for assertive behaviour is experienced by many branches of public life.

Keywords: assertive behaviour, social networks, addiction, communication, university education.

Introduction

In the 40s and 50s, the American scientist Abraham Maslow completed the development of the theory of the hierarchy of human needs. The highest in this hierarchy is the need for self-actualization, that is, the desire to fully realize one's creative potential in life (Maslow, 1943; 1954). In this regard, there is a high interest in studying the characteristics of a personality that contribute to the achievement of life goals and allow the individual to implement his or her abilities in life. Among these features, assertiveness is central. As pointed out by Norton and Warnick, the systematic study of assertion began in the late 1940s and 1950s, when psychologists suggested that some mental diseases are caused by nonassertiveness and resistance or inability to openly express ideas and feelings (Norton & Warnick, 1976).

According to Pfafman (2020), assertiveness is a personality trait that manifests itself in a communication style. In the scientific research, one can find a slightly different understanding of assertiveness. Assertiveness is defined as a background trait associated with a person's temperament that affects several aspects of everyday life (Nicholson et al., 2021, 177). In general terms, assertiveness can be defined as an anti-manipulative trait, a middle ground between aggressiveness and passivity, as well as a strategy of defense against manipulation (Postolati, 2017).

Researchers came to the agreement that there are two categories of assertiveness. Positive self-confidence includes admitting personal flaws, giving and receiving compliments, initiating and maintaining interactions, and expressing positive feelings. Negative assertiveness includes expressing unpopular or different opinion, asking for a behaviour change, and refusing unreasonable requests (Pfafman, 2020). Assertiveness means being able to act on the basis of self-esteem, considering the perspectives of other people, so that the behaviour remains within positive boundaries. Furthermore, to express positive thoughts and feelings, assertive people can also control their actions and assume responsibility (Parray & Sanjay, 2016).

The ability to undertake a responsibility and the ability to take a control of one's speech activity are the main features of assertiveness (Gading, 2020). Assertiveness contributes to the achievement of goals, the development of communication skills, an increase in self-esteem and competence. Assertiveness helps to make smarter decisions without manipulation and respecting the rights of others (Postolati, 2017; Binuja & Nagarajaiah, 2000). At the same time, assertive behaviour is characterized not only by the verbal, but also by the non-verbal component. The body language of assertive individuals differs from the body language of passive individuals (Kumar & Fernandez, 2017, 9).

Assertiveness has special significance in a public speaking situation, when one needs to defend one's point of view calmly and reasonably (Pearson, 1980).

Unlike assertiveness, aggression refers to action the intention of which harms other people or controls them by force. Aggressive assertiveness is more closely related to all four forms of aggression (i.e., physical, verbal, hostility, anger) and domination compared with adaptive assertiveness (Thompson & Berenbaum, 2011).

Assertiveness involves one's right to say no without feeling guilty (Peneva & Mavrodiev, 2013). While assertive individuals have strong attachment, engagement, and pleasure motives, aggressive individuals have strong control of motives and they tend to use force to dominate, control, win, or damage others' self-esteem (Anderson & Martin, 1995). Politeness is a socially and contextually consistent subset of relevance, defined by the interaction between identity, context, and relationships (Jenkins & Dragojevic, 2011).

Manifestations of assertiveness depend on the social environment and cultural characteristics. Assertiveness plays a key role in the self-identification process of children. The socio-economic and educational level of parents affect the level of assertiveness of their children (Sheinov, 2014a). As Furnham wrote, assertiveness is a Western concept, since expressions that are encouraged and appreciated in the West are not welcomed or even are not allowed in other cultures. He concludes that collectivist (Asian) cultures are less assertive than individualistic (Western) ones (Furnham, 1979). Perhaps this fact explains the opposite results obtained in numerous studies.

The assertive communication style in many professions is very desired. Professions related to education, medicine, and management attract particular attention of researchers (Oana et al., 2019; Nakamura et al., 2017; Binuja & Nagarajaiah, 2000; Kumar, Fernandez, 2017). Researchers recognize that poor communication in healthcare is one of the leading causes of medical errors (Nakamura et al., 2017). Teaching assertiveness becomes particularly important in adolescence, when a person's identity is formed and when the foundations for future achievements are laid (Parmaksız et al., 2020).

Pfafman wrote that there is an extensive literature on assertiveness in education, conflict and behaviour modification. There is a growing body of research on health, sports and organizational issues. However, there are many discrepancies in research results, making it difficult to draw a meaningful conclusion about assertiveness (Pfafman, 2020). The contribution of this study is related to the understanding the phenomenon.

As noted above, the well-being of a person's life is associated with assertive behaviour. Meanwhile, issues related to communication such as social networks and smartphones have firmly entered our life. More and more communications are carried out via social networks and smartphones. The latter serve as an intermedium for searching and entering social networks. Frequent use of these means of communication leads to addiction and dependence on them. This is especially true for socially anxious people (Erwin et al., 2004).

Researchers assert that socially anxious people are the group of risk for developing problematic smartphone attachment due to their easy access to social content online (Brand et al., 2019). Moreover, it turned out that dependence on social networks is more common in collectivist countries (Southeast Asia) and in Afrika rather than in individualistic countries of Western Europe and North America (Cheng et al., 2021).

Smartphones are mainly used for communication via social media and instant messaging applications among young people, (Annoni et al., 2021). Research from the United States shows that up to 74% of respondents spend on a social media on a daily basis (Silver, 2019). Other studies have shown that social media addiction can negatively impact one's satisfaction with life (Masood et al., 2021).

Satisfaction with life is one of the main characteristics of assertiveness. Therefore, dependence on social media and smartphone use can serve as an indicator of an unformed assertive behaviour. This dependence was proven indirectly: well-being as a sign of assertive behaviour and is negatively correlated with the failure of self-control in social networks. Self-control in social networks is associated with a more general characteristic self-control and can influence behaviour in various situations (Du et al., 2021). People who have a reduced level of assertiveness are more likely to use

social networks as a means of communication to express their opinions in a way that meets their social needs (Khairunnisa & Putri, 2019).

Sheinov has carried out an extensive study of literature about one's dependence on social networks. He wrote that researchers in different countries agree that one of the main reasons for dependence on social networks is the need for communication. He asserts that women in general are more active in social networks than men, as well as younger users are more active than older ones. Depression and loneliness are the most significant predictors of social media addiction. They have also discovered a positive correlation between addiction to social networks and anxiety, stress, neuroticism, emotional problems, low self-esteem, cyber victimization, physical health problems, mental disorders, procrastination, dependence on smartphones and the Internet, as well as infidelity in relationships (Sheinov, 2021). Research reflects that dependence on social networks is negatively correlated with one's level of income. According to Folaranmi, among young people with a high income who study in Nigerian universities, the percentage of addicts is lower than among young people with a low level of income (Folaranmi, 2013).

Noteworthy data were obtained in the Hou led experiments. The experiment revealed that social media addicts tend to have a low self-esteem. They see social networks as a tool to increase self-esteem. This often leads to the opposite results (Hou et al., 2019). The obtained conclusion confirmed the research carried out by Stavrova & Denissen. Their study has focused on the interpersonal level, people who use social networking more often show lower level of well-being. However, on a personal level, no relationship has been found between the use of social media sites and one's well-being (Stavrova & Denissen, 2020). Self-esteem is the basis of well-being and can affect one's well-being.

Adolescence is sensitive to the development of social media addiction. Teens who are quiet and shy tend to be nervous when meeting other people and tend to be more active on social media compared to how they interact directly (Yao & Zhong, 2014). At the same time, adolescents with a low level of assertiveness are more susceptible to the use of social networks, they use social networks more as a means of expressing their emotions more often (Khairunnisa & Putri, 2019). However, the relationship between assertiveness and social media addiction is not straightforward. Adults with a problematic social media usage may exhibit sufficient cognitive flexibility and control inherent in servant people (Aydin et al., 2020).

The study aims to explore the relationship between individuals' self-assertive behaviour and addiction on the use of social networks.

Methodology

The task of the study was to find out whether there is a link between social media addiction and assertive behaviour.

Participants: Fifty university students agreed to participate in this study on a voluntarily bases. All of them were first-year students from the Daugavpils University's program: "The teacher of preschool education", "The teacher of basic education" and "The teacher of sports". The specifics of the profession influenced the composition of the sample: of the 50 respondents, only three were men. Participation in the study was voluntary.

Materials and Measures: Two tests were used to test a hypothesis. The first test, "*Addiction to social networks*" (Sheinov & Devicin, 2021), contained 15 descriptions of situations associated with the use of social networks. The answer options for each situation were in a continuum from 5 points (I always use them) to 1 point (I use them very rarely). Thus, the minimal score (15 points) testified to complete independence on social networks, and the maximum (75 points) testified a complete dependence on social networks.

The second, "*Test of Assertive Behaviour*" (Sheinov, 2014b), contains 27 questions that dealt with passive, aggressive and assertive behaviour. There were 4 possible answers: from "I always do this" (1 point) to "I never do this" (4 points). Here, the range of the total points were also determined, which indicates to a passive, assertive or aggressive behaviour in communication situations with other people. Both tests were translated from Russian into Latvian. After that, the translation company performed a reverse translation of the test into Russian, which testified that both language options are

adequate in meaning. The Pearson's correlation coefficient ϕ allows one to determine the closeness of the relationship between two variables. This predetermined the choice of the coefficient to calculate the closeness of the relationship between the two variables. The SPSS computer program was used for the calculation of the coefficient ϕ .

Procedure: Considering that the study was conducted in the context of a lockdown and is related to the pandemic, a questionnaire was sent to the respondents by e-mail. E-mail was also used for feedback.

Results and Discussion

The authors analyse the results of the study by calculating the Pearson's correlation coefficient between the indicators of two tests. It turned out to be close to zero. At the first glance, the authors' assumption about the relationship between addiction to social networks and assertiveness turned out to be incorrect. The authors drew attention to the uneven distribution of respondents with different levels of dependence on social networks in the sample under study. In the subgroup under 30, there were both independent respondents and dependent, and significantly dependent (2 cases). In the age group after 30 contains only independent respondents. At the same time, both in the first and in the second age groups there were both passive and assertive and aggressive (according to the results of the second test) individuals.

Table 1

Distribution of the number of respondents by test results

Groups	Dependency on Social Networks			Communicative behaviour		
	No dependency	Dependent	Very dependent	Passivity	Assertively	Aggression
Until 30	21	9	2	9	15	8
30+	18	0	0	0	9	9

Table 1 shows that differences between age groups are manifested not only in the absence of respondent's dependent on social networks in the older group, but also in a large (in percentage terms) individuals are inclined to show aggression in communication situations. There were no "passive" respondents in the second age group at all. Mann's U-test and the Whitney test showed (with a confidence level of 0.05) that there are two different samples. The difference between the samples is also manifested when calculating the average indicators for each test.

Table 2

The average value of the test results for each age group

Groups	Dependent on Social networks	Assertive
Until 30	36.19	64.69
30+	25.89	71.17

Table 2 shows how the selected age groups differ. The respondents under the age of 30 use social networking opportunities more often than respondents of the second age group. The average value of the indicators according to the results of the first test approaches the border of dependencies. The average value according to the results of the second test is within the boundaries of assertiveness. The respondents from the second age group are not dependent on social networks. However, the average scores in the assertiveness test indicate that they are more likely to use aggressive communication in communication situations.

The previous analysis showed that for the further research this is necessary to take data from the first age group. In the second one, the variables are not a variable in the true meaning of the word.

Further analysis was carried out in the following sub-sample groups with up to 30 years old: passive who demonstrate dependence on social networks; assertive - dependence on social networks; and aggressive who demonstrate addiction to social networks. To determine the relationship between the two variables, the ϕ coefficient was used. The coefficient ϕ allows one to determine the closeness

of relationship between two variables in tables. The values for each pair of variables are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Coefficients ϕ calculated for dichotomous relations of the variables of the continuum dependence on social networks - features of communicative relations (assertiveness)

The dichotomy of variables	The values of the coefficient ϕ
Passivity - addiction	0.438
Assertiveness - addiction	0.252
Aggressiveness - addiction	0.471

Table 3 shows that the relationship between assertiveness and dependence on social networks is non-linear. Statistically significant correlation coefficients were obtained only for groups of passive and aggressive respondents. To confirm the conclusions, further studies are need to be done with a large number of respondents - representatives of various professions and age categories.

Conclusions

It follows from theoretical research that dependence on social networks, using them too often and too much, develops more for socially restless people. People with lower education and lower incomes are potentially more likely to become addicted to social networks, as they are more likely to use social networks as a means of expressing emotions due to lower self-esteem. The more confident a person is, the less likely they are to get caught up in social networks.

The conclusions of this study cannot be generalized. A small number of respondents, who participated in this study, were from the same social and professional stratum and were mainly women. The research indicates that the following factors are necessary to consider: the age of the respondents, their professional affiliation, and gender. Respondents in the younger group use social networking opportunities more often than respondents in the older age group. The study shows that respondents in the age group over 30 are not dependent on social networks, but the average results of the self-confidence test indicate that they are more likely to use aggressive communication in communication situations.

This study reveals the connection between the assertive behaviour and its relations with the use of social networks and addiction to them. The relationships between assertiveness and dependence on social networks are complex and non-linear. The nonlinearity of the connection is manifested in the fact that the so-called passive, assertive and aggressive respondents have their own characteristics in the manifestation of this connection. Self-confident people are able to act responsibly and respect other people, and they are able to justify their views calmly and argumentatively. A passive person limits himself in his activities, he likes to sit aside and watch someone else's life. Aggressive people tend to control others, damaging their self-esteem, and tend to use force to dominate.

The demand for assertive behaviour in the communicative professions is relevant for medicine, pedagogy, politics and public services.

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