

## Chapter #20

# THE INFLUENCE OF DEPENDENCE ON SOCIAL NETWORKS ON THE ASSERTIVE BEHAVIOR OF A PERSON

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### ABSTRACT

The requirement of assertive behavior in communicative professions is relevant for the field of medicine, pedagogy, politics and public service. The purpose of the study is to establish a link between assertive and non-assertive communicative behavior and addiction to social networks. For this purpose, Sheinov's tests were used, translated from Russian into Latvian. The results indicate to a high reliability of the translated version. The experiment involved 50 participants of Daugavpils University who study pedagogy. The study showed that the relationship between assertive behavior and social media addiction is non-linear. Statistically significant negative values of this relationship were obtained from assertive respondents in the age group under 30. In the same age group, statistically correct positive results were obtained, confirming the presence of such a dependence of non-assertive respondents of the same age group. The results of the study suggest possible changes in the content of courses intended for teachers and that can be used in trainings of assertive behavior.

*Keywords:* assertiveness, social networks, passivity, aggressiveness, success, anxiety.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The requirement of assertive behaviour in communicative professions is relevant for medicine, pedagogy, politics and public service. The attention of researchers to the study of assertive behavior and its relationship with other personal and behavioral characteristics of a person first manifested itself after the Second World War. At the same time, it was reported that chosen behavior in situations of professional and personal communication affects not only social achievements of the individual, but also the results of his or her professional activity. Researchers showed their interested in the features of the personality and culture in which a person is grounded and which contribute to preventing manifestation of assertiveness (anxiety, a tendency to aggressive behavior, the place of residence, etc.).

Technological advances of recent years supplement the list of correlates of assertive behavior with dependence on smartphones and social networks. The problem is related to the clarification of relationships between these dependencies and assertive behavior since this relationship can affect adversely personal and professional growth of an individual.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The following trends have been noted in the study of assertive behavior in recent years. The social geography of research on social networking and addiction on it is expanding. Assertiveness tests and other research tools have been created and applied for practical use, the purpose of which is to study the phenomena associated with assertiveness. Here comes also the problem of validity of these tests. The fact is that the criteria for assertive behavior are related to culture (Makarevičs & Iliško, 2022).

The behavior that in one culture may be interpreted as passive or aggressive, in another culture is understood as expected and normal in line with cultural norms. Therefore, there are lots of contradictions that researchers are facing from different cultures. Thus, on the one hand, scientific papers written by representatives of Muslim countries refer to higher level of assertive behaviour in men as compared to women (Furnham, 1979).

At the same time, researchers representing Christian countries in Europe and North America recorded opposite trends (Kumar & Fernandez, 2017; Pfafman & McEwan, 2014; Postolati, 2017). The solution to the problem is creation or adaptation of tests that meet the requirements and specifics of the modern cultural environment.

In relation to the problem of assertiveness, maintaining positive affect in the recipient and considering possible consequences of its expression (Pfafman, 2020). Others refer to the anti-manipulative function of assertiveness, its golden mean between the two poles of social behavior (passivity - aggressiveness) and its connection to self-actualization (Postolati, 2017; Peneva & Mavrodiev, 2013).

The behavioral repertoire, with passivity at one pole and aggressiveness at the other, suggests the existence of three types of personalities: assertive and non-assertive people, who, in turn, are divided into passive and aggressive (Sheinov, 2014a). Anderson and Martin point out that assertive individuals display high attachment, inclusion, and pleasure motives, aggressive individuals show increased control motivation and a tendency to use force to dominate, control, conquer, or damage another person's self-esteem (Anderson & Martin, 1995).

Assertiveness is a communicative trait that is most often manifested as a result of social or special learning (Parray, Kumar, & David, 2020).

Having said this, we can formulate the first goal of current research. It consists of selecting tests that refer to the requirements of the local culture by translating them into the state language (in this case, Latvian) by using them for research and diagnostic purposes. The research task is to find out the correlates of assertiveness.

A number of recent studies confirm the negative relationship between assertiveness and anxiety of the individual (Niusha, Farghadani, & Safari, 2012). It is also stressed that assertiveness increases individual's motivation for the academic achievement (Siota, 2018): assertive individuals show higher results in life satisfaction tests (Siota, 2018) and assertive behavior reduces the level of anxiety (Fornell & Westbrook, 1979, Pfafman, 2017).

On the other hand, it should be emphasized that assertive behavior of communication partners can be perceived as an aggression. But, as Chamberlain note that this aggression is perceived as instrumental but not as hostile (Chamberlain, 2009).

Research implies that there is an association between low levels of assertiveness (passivity) and higher levels of anxiety (Siota, 2018). A low level of assertiveness, in turn, may be associated with the dissatisfaction with life, which is compensated by dependence on social networks (Sahin, 2017). At the same time, the social abilities of the individual decrease (Khairunnisa & Putri, 2019), difficulties appear with the formation of social identity, which is compensated by communication in social networks (Wainne, 2018). In social networks, by

the use of anonymity, individuals demonstrate aggression that they cannot demonstrate in real communication (Black, Mezzina, & Thompson, 2016).

Researchers also reflect that socially anxious people may use social media to present themselves positively and demonstrate assertive behaviour (Casale & Fioravanti, 2015).

Social networks are a relatively new phenomenon that can change the usual way of life and doing things. Social networks can replace direct communication, which can affect the quality of life and socialization of an individual through technical devices that allows one to use both, communication network (smartphone) and, through a smartphone, to join global social networks. A positive relationship has been found between smartphone addiction and anxiety in adolescents aged 13-15 (Korniseva & Rudika, 2018). As indicated above, anxiety correlates with low life satisfaction. On the other hand, there is a negative relationship and moderate correlation between life satisfaction and social media addiction (Sahin, 2017). As indicated above, anxiety correlates with low satisfaction with life. On the other hand, there is a negative relationship and moderate correlation between life satisfaction and social media addiction (Sahin, 2017). These complex interrelated phenomena, which are described, show that assertive behavior, characterized by self-confidence and low levels of anxiety, has an antipode, which manifests itself as an addiction to social networks and an increased level of anxiety. Discovering a statistically meaningful and significant relationship between assertiveness and the degree of dependence on social networks was the second task of this study.

The interest of researchers in adolescence and youth and the search for ways to train assertive behavior is increasing. This is also necessary to take into account the peculiarities of the local culture and gender, since according to the results of some studies, women are more dependent on social networks (Andreassen, Pallesen & Griffiths, 2017; Biernatowska & Balcerowska, 2017). According to other studies, males are more dependent on social networks (Kircaburun, 2016).

There are many theories about social media addiction. According to Azizi, Soroush, and Khatony (2019), dynamic psychology theory and social control theory are among the most popular ones. The authors of the theory of dynamic psychology consider the origins of dependence on social networks in family's upbringing. Assertiveness is a communicative trait that has been observed as the most often manifested and is a result of social and special learning. According to Parrai and other scientists, special training in assertive behavior of high school students increases self-esteem and reduces the level of aggressiveness (Parray, Kumar, & David, 2020).

### **3. RESEARCH DESIGN, METHODOLOGY**

The relevance of the study of addiction to social networks in connection with the assertive behavior and is well formulated by D. Evgin, who wrote that when considering a way in dealing with addiction to social networks, one can say that addiction to social networks has ceased to be a common problem and has become a disease interpreted as a global epidemic (Sumen & Evgin, 2021).

There are over 30 different self-rating scales that are widely used to measure and rate assertiveness and social media addiction. Almost all of them need to be improved, or, as Esgi (2016) reports, those tests do not have sufficient reliability and validity if applied in different cultures. For diagnostic and research purposes, we have chosen two tests that were developed by the Belarusian researcher Viktor Sheinov, as they were developed in a neighbouring culture and have undergone all the necessary procedures for validation and reliability (Sheinov, 2014b, 2021).

The first test is measuring a propensity for assertive behavior. It contains 26 statements, some of which are related to assertive behavior. The other part of the same test relates to aggressive and passive behavior. The social media addiction test consists of 15 statements measured according to the Likert scale. Statistical data provided by the author were used to calibrate the responses. After translation from the Russian into Latvian language, a back translation has been carried out and was acknowledged by the author. During the first test, that was carried out a month after testing, it was stated that the coefficients between the first and second results were 0.98 and 0.96 according to the Pearson criterion.

The experiment involved 50 people who took part in this study on a voluntary basis. All of them were the students from the educational department of Daugavpils University. The age of participants were ranging from 20 to 63. Questionnaires were sent to all participants by e-mail. In the same way authors have obtained the answers.

#### 4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The analysis of the results indicates to the correlation between the two measured values, according to the Pearson criterion that is -0.49 (true at a significance level of 0.05).

This meant that with an increase in the score on the assertiveness test, the dependence on social networks decreased. But this contradicted our hypothesis. High scores on the assertiveness test were classified as aggressive behavior. This ruled out the lack of dependence on social networks. But this contradicted the theoretical concept that we adhered to. The contradiction was resolved by grouping the participants for the analyses of data according to their specific dominant characteristics (passive, assertive and conditionally aggressive). The connection between phenomena is not linear, but U-shaped. The dominance of the assertive individuals in the sample was leading to this result. In addition, the analysis of the obtained data in this study showed that the age criterion should also be taken into account. The updated data on respondents that were used in the final analysis are displayed in Table 1. Thirty-two respondents were included in the group of participants under 30, but in the group of participants older than 30, there were 18 participants. All participants of the study were women except of three men. This could be explained by the fact that teaching profession is mostly selected by women (see in Table 1).

*Table 1.  
Sample of the study.*

<b>Sample</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>	<b>Males/females</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b><math>\sigma</math></b>
All participants	50	3/47	27.7	9.99
Under 30	32	1/31	20.1	3.4
30 + years old	18	2/16	38.8	7.42

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Table 2 reflects the distribution of the number of respondents by the test results.

*Table 2.  
Distribution of the number of respondents by the test results.*

Groups	Dependency on Social Networks			Communicative behaviour		
	No dependency	Dependent	Very dependent	Passivity	Assertivity	Agression
Uttill 30	21 (65%)	9 (28%)	2 (7%)	9 (28%)	15 (47%)	8 (25%)
30+	18 (100%)	0	0	0	9 (50%)	9 (50%)

The average values were calculated according to the analyses of weights for different age groups (see Table 2).

*Table 3.  
Average values of test results for each age group.*

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

Further analysis was carried out in the following subsamples under the age of 30: passive individuals who demonstrated dependence on social networks; assertive - dependence on social networks and aggressive participants demonstrated dependence on social networks. Assertive individuals depend on social networks and demonstrate aggressive behavior. The average scores for two tests in each study group were calculated. A  $\phi$  coefficient was used to determine if there are significant differences between the mean values of the measurements obtained in two different groups. The coefficient  $\phi$  was used to determine the relationship between two variables. The values for each pair of variables are shown in Table 4.

*Table 4.  
Coefficients  $\phi$  for dichotomous relations of the variables of the continuum dependence on social networks - features of communicative relations.*

The dichotomy of variables	The values of the coefficient $\phi$
Passivity - addiction	0.438
Assertiveness - addiction	0.252
Aggressiveness - addiction	0.471

In the first and third cases, the probability of an event corresponds to a probability level of 0.05.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The goal of the study was to explore the connection between assertive and non-assertive communicative behavior and addiction to social networks. The second table shows that in the student environment of future certified teachers, all social network addicts are in the age group under 30. This is confirmed by the data displayed in the third table. According to the results in the second table, teachers who have already had an experience of work in school (this was reported by the respondents themselves) may increase the level of aggressive behavior.

The fourth table shows that there are significant statistical relationships between social media addiction among the so-called passive and aggressive respondents.

The evidence suggests that the problem of social media addiction is relevant for younger generation. This can be explained by the fact that at this age there might be problems with the ongoing formation of personal identity. Professional identity has just begun to form. Passion for social networks can compensate these problems.

There were no passive respondents in the age group 30+ as there are no addicts to social networks. At the same time, the percentage of respondents who use an aggressive style of communication is increasing. In the age group 30+, all respondents work in educational institutions. They went to study to receive necessary pedagogical education. This may indicate that in the professional activities of teachers, the habit of an aggressive style of communication should be eliminated but assertive communication style should be promoted since this style helps to achieve the desired result. In teaching one needs to be assertive in order to achieve better results. Aggressive style of communication needs to be eliminated since it does not relate to current paradigms in education.

**Research limitations.** The findings of this study cannot be generalized. A small number of respondents who took part in this study are from the same social and professional field of work and are mostly women. Only three men took part in the study. The results show that in studies related to assertive behavior and dependence on social networks, this is necessary to take into account the following factors: the characteristics of a regional culture, the age of the respondents, their professional affiliation, and gender. The study will be continued in the future, and the results will either confirm or modify the conclusions presented in this article.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The connection between assertive behavior and the dependence of individuals of social networks is non-linear.

When considering this connection, the age, gender and professional publication of the respondents must be taken into account.

The problems associated with dependence on social networks are relevant for respondents under 30 and is less relevant for the older generation.

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