

## Social network activity of students in conditions of an epidemiological threat

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### Abstract

The period of restrictions on social contacts introduced by the governments of different countries increased the time spent by users in social networks. The paper aims to analyze the Internet activity of students in social networks as a way of overcoming interaction difficulties in the context of an epidemiological threat. The research used the observation method and questionnaires to collect data for this research. The sample for the research consisted of 300 students between ages of 18 and 22, who were purposively sampled. Using content analysis and the statistical program for social sciences, the collected data were analyzed. As a result of the study, it was established that the Internet activity of students in social networks in the context of an epidemiological threat and globalization in general, determines the level of development and the content framework of a person's self-attitude.

**Keywords:** activity; epidemiological threat; social network; manifestations of activity; self-attitud

### 1. Introduction

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Social interaction plays a significant role in the life of every person. Satisfaction with life and the experience of happiness largely depends on how successfully the interaction with the people around, with significant ones is built.

The epidemiological threat that has arisen in the context of the spread of the viral infection COVID-19 has led to new difficult situations for most people in society. In particular, the forced restrictions imposed by the governments of different countries, the need for self-isolation, as well as information about the high contagiousness and virulence of the new virus, its mutations, the emergence of new strains, causing the fear of contracting an infection from other people, led to a disruption of the usual way of life, made it difficult to contact with other people, reduced a person's ability to engage in social interaction, feel in demand, receive social validation of their worth, and increased the risk of blocking communication and acceptance needs from others (Gazizov et al., 2020; Klevtsov & Vasyukov, 2021). One of the means of overcoming these difficulties was to turn to virtual communication tools, to social networks.

Social networks have gained incredible popularity today. All leading operators note a sharp surge in user activity during the period of restrictions on social contacts introduced by the governments of different countries, an increase in the time spent by users in social networks (Yesilyurt & Solpuk Turhan, 2020). Young people are especially active in social networks. If before the pandemic, young people actively used voice calls and video calls, today they prefer correspondence in instant messengers, use symbols instead of text messages. At the same time, there is an ever-increasing desire on the part of a significant number of young people to present themselves on social networks through obtaining approval from other users in the form of a "like" at any cost, often using shocking pictures or stories reflecting acts that pose a threat to health and life both to the author himself and other people. Such attraction of attention, in our opinion, is related to the problems of the young person's self-attitude, with difficulties in constructive self-presentation using adequate means.

The validity of this thesis is substantiated in studies of the social and psychological characteristics of users of social networks and their behavior in the Internet space (Golub & Lysenko, 2018; Belinskaya & Prilutskaya, 2019; Levin, 2020; Tugun et al., 2020; Nguyen et al., 2021; Zheltukhina et al., 2021; Begishev, Khisamova & Vasyukov, 2021a). It has been shown that social networks are the most important means of personal communication for the overwhelming majority of young people, attribution of certain parameters of social status (virtual social status) to a user by an outside observer (virtual social status) is associated with such personal characteristics of the user as neuroticism, Machiavellianism, narcissism, and self-monitoring. In this regard, it is important to understand what opportunities, along with the studied risks, can be presented for the formation of a positive self-presentation by adequate means (Goloshumova et al., 2019a). The growing popularity of social networks necessitates the tasks of studying the specifics of this kind of interaction, identifying its psychological resources to overcome difficult situations and risks.

### **1.1. Theoretical analysis**

Communication in social networks is actively studied today in psychology, pedagogy, philosophy, and other related fields of science. Social networks are a type of websites that are designed to build, reflect, and organize social relationships (Mokhnacheva, 2011). The characteristic features of social networks are the opportunity to create individual user profiles, the possibility of their interaction (using personal messages or comments), the capacity to achieve common goals and create internal social groups of interests, to exchange information and meet needs (Duzhnikova, 2010). Social interaction in social networks is based on the information in the personal profiles of users (Bayanova et al., 2019; Tameryan et al., 2020; Piralova et al., 2020; Begishev, Khisamova & Vasyukov, 2021b).

The following functions of social networks that are significant for a person are identified:

-communication function contributes to satisfying communication needs, support and overcoming communication deficits, expanding the circle of contacts, establishing business contacts;

-information function contributes to the satisfaction of the need for novelty, obtaining information, its dissemination; the exchange of information in social networks has a two-way direction, users can be both communicators and recipients.

-socializing function: promotes the adoption of social norms, values, knowledge required both in real and in virtual space; promotes the socialization of individuals experiencing difficulties in real communication.

-identification function: the social "I" is formed by identifying oneself with any group of people or opposing oneself to another group; with the help of social networks, the process of self-identification becomes easier.

-entertainment function contributes to the satisfaction of the need for rest, overcoming the deficit of positive emotions and impressions, but in some cases, it can become a means of escapism, a way of avoiding reality.

-self-actualization function: social networks are the easiest and most accessible way for self-expression; they are often a repository of the creative work of its users (Sadygova, 2012).

### **1.2. Related research**

From the point of view of resources for overcoming difficult situations, we also think that it is important to emphasize the function of self-presentation (Naumova, 2016). In a social network, a person can present himself to other people, create a certain impression about himself, and provide a presentation of his own image. Studies show that virtual self-presentation in a social network can be carried out by a person in different ways. For some users, it becomes the realization of the "ideal I" (Zhichkina & Belinskaya, 2017). Other social media users with the help of personal profiles project their real identity into the virtual space (Wilson, Gosling & Graham, 2012). For other users, self-presentation in social media is an opportunity to manage their impression of themselves completely (Becker, 1997). And finally, virtual self-presentation demonstrates "I" in conflict with oneself (Naumova, 2016).

A change of identity and self-presentation in social networks is also possible. In this case, there are several reasons: starting from compensation in the absence of satisfaction from the parties to their real identity; self-actualization when it is impossible to express oneself in real life; to curiosity, the creation of a new image of "I", and the desire to joke (Antonova & Odintsova, 2010; Goloshumova et.al., 2019b; Romanova et.al., 2019).

Some researchers consider a profile in a social network as a "metaphor of the user's life path", and activity in social networks appears as an art process of creating his own static gestalt image (Chekhonina, 2015). Evidently, self-presentation in social networks has the resource potential for realizing the need for social interaction in the context of new realities, and its study creates additional opportunities for providing psychological assistance and supporting the individual in a situation of experiencing difficulties (Salakhova et.al., 2019).

### **1.3 Purpose of study**

From previous research, it is evident that individuals present themselves on social media to create a desired image. The COVID-19 pandemic influenced the intensity with which students participate in social network activities, as well as how they impact other people in their social network spaces with their personal activities. The goal of the study is to identify the individual's activity manifestations in social networks and to study the relationship between activity manifestations in social networks and self-attitude of the individual.

## **2. Methods and Materials**

In our study, we proceeded from the methodology of the resource approach, considering personal potential (Leontiev, 2011) as an integrative set of personal qualities as the main resources for overcoming. Taking account of the results of our previous studies devoted to the personal resources of overcoming difficult situations by students and teachers (Kalinina, 2011) showing that among the personal characteristics that provide a constructive overcoming of difficulties, the self-attitude of the individual

occupies a special place, we assumed that the resource capacity of social networks can be found in aspects of providing opportunities for self-presentation and the development of a positive self-attitude of the individual.

### **2.1. Participants**

The participants for this research consisted of 300 students, with 144 protocols. The participants were young students aged between eighteen (18) and twenty-two (22) years. The selected sample was justified by the objectives of this research. Since most young people who fall into this age group are more prone to social network activities, it was essential to select them as the sample for this study. The sampling method was therefore purposive.

### **2.2. Data collection tools**

Data collection was organized during the period of forced self-isolation, based on the Google Docs platform in a remote mode. Two separate tools were used. First, observation and secondly a questionnaire. To study self-attitude, the self-attitude questionnaire of V. V. Stolin and S. R. Pantilev was used. This was used to ascertain the choices of a wider range of students on their interaction on social networks and how it affects their self-attitude.

### **2.3. Data collection process**

The protocol encoded the subject's name, gender, age, and educational level. In the protocol, the subjects also had to indicate links to their social networks - VKontakte and Instagram. The number of photos for the studied period, the number of friends on the VKontakte social network, the number of subscriptions and subscribers on the Instagram social network were also recorded. Thereafter, the results were analyzed.

### **2.4. Data Analysis**

Manifestations of the respondents' activity in social networks were analyzed using the method of content analysis. We analyzed photographs posted on the personal pages of the study participants in the social networks VKontakte and Instagram. The units of analysis were semantic categories reflecting images in photographs: selfies, landscape / architecture, single photos, group photos, hobbies / work, non-author's images. A total of 2,397 photographs were analyzed. The results from the questionnaire were processed using correlation analysis with the help of the Statistical program for Social Sciences (SPSS 20).

## **3. Results**

### **3.1. Results from observation**

Based on the study results of the respondents' self-attitude, two groups were identified: with a high level of self-attitude and with a low level of self-attitude. In the group of participants with a low level of self-attitude, it was found that 34% of the respondents were dissatisfied with themselves and their capabilities, had doubts about their own ability to have respect. Forty-five percent (45%) of the participants have internal disagreement with themselves, do not accept themselves as they are. Thirty-four percent (34%) of the participants tend to blame themselves for all the failures that occur in their lives. Twenty-nine percent (29%) feel their inability to resist fate, do not believe that they can somehow influence their future. Fifty percent (50%) doubt that their personality can inspire respect and sympathy from other people. Twenty-nine percent (29%) of the respondents have no interest in their own thoughts and feelings, the willingness to communicate with themselves on an equal footing, confidence in their interest. Thirty-four percent (34%) of the participants see mainly disadvantages in themselves. The selected groups were compared in terms of activity manifestations in social networks using the Mann-Whitney test. The results are given in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Comparison of groups with high and low levels of self-attitude in terms of activity manifestations in the social network (average number of images encountered)

Activity in social networks	Mean value in the group with a high level of self-attitude	Mean value in the group with a low level of self-attitude	U	Asymptotic significance (p<0.05)
Selfie	7,055	2,923	58,000	0,019
Solo photo	18,333	12,615	93,000	0,346
Landscape and architecture	5,722	11,230	66,500	0,045
Photos with other people	8,611	6,923	106,000	0,674
Hobbies and work	7,555	3,846	116,500	1,000
Non-author's photos	0,611	0,769	113,500	0,904
Number of photos for 2 years	49,888	39,538	117,000	0,984
Total number of photos	105,444	90,615	111,000	0,825
Subscriptions	304,333	215,076	84,000	0,193
Subscribers	396,888	262,153	81,000	0,155

The results show that people with a high level of self-attitude are more likely to post selfies and less likely to post photos of landscape and architecture than people with a low level of self-attitude. This is associated with the fact that people who often post personal photos, selfies, are more confident in themselves and in their positive assessment by other people. People who often post photos of landscape / architecture doubt that they can be of interest to other people, do not accept themselves as they are, see mostly shortcomings in themselves.

### 3.2. Results from survey

The relationship between self-attitude indicators and activity manifestations in social networks was found with the help of correlation analysis using Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (see Table 2).

**Table 2:** Relationship between self-attitude indicators and subjects' activity manifestations in a social network

Self-attitude indicators	Activity manifestations in social networks							
	Selfie	Solo photo	Landscape and architecture	Hobbies / Work	Non-author's photos	Number of photos	Subscriptions	Subscribers
Scale S	<b>0,431</b>	0,136	<b>-0,387</b>	0,001	0,098	-0,019	0,249	0,275
Self-respect	0,339	0,059	-0,274	-0,081	-0,012	-0,049	0,340	0,283
Auto-affection	<b>0,464</b>	0,128	-0,131	0,078	0,316	0,139	0,108	0,166
Expected attitude	-0,030	-0,092	<b>-0,373</b>	0,085	-0,148	-0,255	0,004	-0,131
Self-confidence	0,302	0,005	-0,289	0,056	0,081	-0,053	0,260	0,292
Self-acceptance	<b>0,433</b>	0,278	-0,040	0,129	0,310	0,248	0,112	0,278

Self-guidance	0,124	0,125	0,021	0,079	-0,133	0,078	0,089	0,069
Self-accusation	<b>-0,412</b>	-0,027	0,198	0,187	-0,047	-0,052	-0,111	-0,073
Self-interest	<b>0,402</b>	0,265	-0,346	0,065	-0,003	0,059	0,222	0,276
Self-understanding	-0,022	-0,055	0,113	-0,258	0,075	-0,097	-0,018	0,132

The results show that indicators of integral self-attitude, auto-affection, self-acceptance, self-interest have significant positive relationships with the number of selfies posted. The more selfies the subject posts on the social network, the more they approve of themselves, are confident in their interest to others, accept their flaws and have a positive self-esteem.

The indicator of self-accusation has a significant negative relationship with the number of selfies posted. The greater the number of selfies, the fewer negative emotions the subject has concerning himself, which allows him to accept himself and show to the others. Indicators of integral self-attitude and expected attitudes from others are negatively associated with the number of landscape and architecture photographs posted. The higher the number of landscape and architecture photos posted, the worse the expected attitude from other people and in general, the lower self-attitude. The subject constantly expects disapproval from others, fears negative reactions, and therefore posts fewer photographs of his own.

#### 4. Discussion

During the study, significant differences were found in the activity manifestations of subjects with different self-attitudes in social networks. The subjects with a high level of self-attitude post more selfies and fewer photos of landscape and architecture on the social network than the subjects with a low level of self-attitude, that is, they are characterized by the desire to present themselves to the world, they are confident in themselves and positive assessment by other people (Al Hashimi, Mahdi, Al Muwali & Zaki, 2019). The subjects with a low level of self-attitude by posting photographs of landscape and architecture transfer attention from themselves and their lives to other objects. A shift in focus of attention to the outside world may indicate less satisfaction with social contacts. This is confirmed by the lower number of subscriptions and subscribers. At the same time, fewer subscribers may be indicative of the fact that people are more interested in following the personal profiles of cheerful and confident people (Ozkisi & Topaloglu, 2018).

Significant relationships between the components of self-attitude and manifestations of personality activity in social networks were found during the study. The higher the rates of auto-affection, self-acceptance, self-interest, global self-attitude and the lower the rate of self-accusation, the more selfies are posted on the user's page (Yehya, 2020). It can be stated that posting a selfie is typical for people who show interest in themselves, their inner world, their mood, and well-being, who accept themselves along with their shortcomings and their place in life (Bulu, Numanoglu & Keser, 2021). Landscape and architecture postings are correlated with indicators of expected self-attitude and global self-attitude. The lower the indicator of expected attitudes from others and global self-attitudes, the greater the number of postings of landscape and architecture photographs. Probably, a person who is shy, less confident, afraid of disapproval and does not accept himself and his possible shortcomings is afraid to post his own photographs, expecting a negative reaction from other people, and therefore shifts attention from himself to the world around him.

#### 5. Conclusions



The results obtained, due to the smallness of the sample, cannot have a wide extrapolation, but are of interest in the aspect of diagnostic work and the search for grounds to develop strategies for psychological assistance. Based on the results obtained, we can say that the content of a social network page may indicate certain characteristics of a person's self-attitude. The study of the content of the page can help to see the specifics of the self-attitude of the individual, and the involvement of the author of the page in self-disclosure through the content with the positive characteristics of self-attitude can create the basis for psychological support.

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