

A combination of personality traits might make you more addicted to social networks

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Binghamton University School of Management assistant professor of information systems Isaac Vaghefi. Credit: Binghamton University, State University of New York

As social networking companies feel the heat to create a more socially

responsible and positive experience for their millions of users, new research out of Binghamton University, State University of New York explores how the interaction of personality traits can impact the likelihood of developing an addiction to social networking.

"There has been plenty of research on how the interaction of certain [personality](#) traits affects addiction to things like alcohol and drugs," said Binghamton University School of Management assistant professor of information systems Isaac Vaghefi. "We wanted to apply a similar framework to social networking addiction."

Vaghefi, with the help of Hamed Qahri-Saremi of DePaul University, collected self-reported data from nearly 300 college-aged students, and found that three personality traits in particular - neuroticism, [conscientiousness](#) and agreeableness - were related to social network addiction.

These three personality traits are part of the five-factor personality model, a well-established framework used to theoretically understand the human personality. Researchers found that the two other traits in the model - extraversion and openness to experience - did not play much of a role in the likelihood of developing a social network addiction.

In addition to testing the effect the singular traits had, researchers tested how the traits interact with one another as they relate to social network addiction.

"It's a complex and complicated topic. You can't have a simplistic approach," said Vaghefi.

Neuroticism and conscientiousness

On their own, the personality traits of neuroticism and conscientiousness

have direct negative and positive effects on the likelihood of developing a social network addiction.

Researchers found that neuroticism (the extent to which people experience negative emotions such as stress and anxiety) seemed to increase the likelihood of developing an addiction to social network sites.

On the other hand, higher amounts of conscientiousness (having impulse control and the drive to achieve specific goals) seemed to decrease the likelihood of developing a social network addiction.

But when tested together, they found that neuroticism seemed to moderate the effect of conscientiousness as it relates to social network addiction.

Because someone can simultaneously be highly neurotic and conscientious, researchers found that even if someone is able to practice self-discipline and regularly persists at achieving goals, the fact that they may also be a stressful and anxious person often overrides the perceived control they may have over social network use.

This moderation effect could cause a conscientious person to be more likely to develop an addiction to [social networking sites](#).

Conscientiousness and agreeableness

Researchers found that agreeableness alone, the degree to which someone is friendly, empathetic and helpful, didn't have a significant effect on social network addiction - but this changes when combined with conscientiousness.

A combination of low levels of both agreeableness and conscientiousness

(someone can be both generally unsympathetic and irresponsible) often are related to a higher likelihood of social network addiction - but, oddly enough, so are a combination of high levels of both agreeableness and conscientiousness.

Vaghefi said this unexpected finding could be explained from a "rational addiction" perspective, meaning some users are intentionally using more of a social [network](#) to maximize the perceived benefits of it.

For example, he said an agreeable and friendly person may be making a very conscientious decision to use social networks more in order to interact with their friends, as they make it a deliberate goal to flourish those relationships through the use of social networks.

This is unique because this addiction would not be a result of irrationality or a lack of impulse control, as is often associated with addiction. Rather, a person would be developing an addiction through a rational and well-meaning process.

Vaghefi hopes that based on this research, people will look at the "whole picture" when it comes to how [personality traits](#) impact social networking addiction.

"It's more of a holistic approach to discover what kind of people are more likely to develop an [addiction](#)," said Vaghefi. "Rather than just focusing on one personality trait, this allows you to look at an all-inclusive personality profile."

More information: Vaghefi's paper, "Personality Predictors of IT Addiction", was presented at the 51st Hawaii International Conference on Systems Science (Jan 2018).

Provided by Binghamton University

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